NEW
NICK CARTER WEEKLY

Issued Weekly. By subscription $2.50 per year. Entered as Second-class Matter at the N. Y. Post Office, by STREET & SMITH, 79-89 Seventh Ave., N. Y.

No. 544 NEW YORK, JUNE 1, 1907. **Price, Five Cents**

A TRAGEDY OF THE FOOTLIGHTS

—OR—

NICK CARTER AND THE TEMPLE OF VICE

BY THE AUTHOR OF "NICK CARTER"

With a quick leap from her chair she struck a bell upon the table, immediately four pictures on walls swung aside and in each stood a liveried negro servant with a rifle aimed at Nick's hear

NEW NICK CARTER WEEKLY

Issued Weekly. By subscription $2.50 per year. Entered as Second-class Matter at the N. Y. Post Office, by STREET & SMITH, *79-89 Seventh Avenue, N. Y. Entered according to Act of Congress in the year 1907, in the Office of the Librarian of Congress, Washington, D. C.*

No. 544. NEW YORK, June 1, 1907. Price Five Cents.

A TRAGEDY OF THE FOOTLIGHTS;

OR,

NICK CARTER AND THE TEMPLE OF VICE.

Edited by CHICKERING CARTER.

CHAPTER I.

THE TRAGEDY BEHIND THE FOOTLIGHTS.

The city of Boston was stirred to the depths by an incident which was captioned in the newspapers as the "Tragedy of the Footlights."

A calamity which was totally inexplicable had happened in the midst of a performance at one of the theaters, the name of which need not be mentioned here for obvious reasons, and the result was that a prominent actor who had won an international reputation had been struck down in the midst of the best scene of his performance, and he had died a very few moments afterward.

The act in which he was engaged formed a part of a very attractive vaudeville bill, and it took up approximately one-third of the regular performance.

Merrill Gwynn, the victim of this tragedy, was a man just past thirty years of age, was a descendant of a family of actors, and had won a well-deserved reputation in what is known as the "Legitimate"; and had only during the last two seasons appeared on the vaudeville stage.

But a prominent playwright had furnished him with a long, one-act play, which required only three performers, one of whom could easily be supplied from among the supernumeraries who are always ready at hand about the stage-door of a theater.

The piece itself, entitled "The Man-hater," was a modern and up-to-date adaptation of the idea of the taming of a shrew, and the performance of it had excited wide interest throughout every city on the theatrical circuit where it had been performed.

It is not necessary that we should describe the play itself, for that has nothing to do with our story, save in so far as the scene in which the tragedy actually occurred was supposed to represent a violent quarrel between the two principal characters of the act, the man and the woman.

The name of the actress who played the female character of this piece was Carlina Carroll, and Carlina's husband, James Carroll, acted in the capacity of advance agent, press-agent, and manager for the little company.

It should be said right here that the members of this company of three lived in perfect harmony. A warm friendship had existed always between Merrill Gwynn and James Carroll; and Carlina Carroll was known in

the profession as a woman whose career had always been above reproach; nothing had ever been said against her or to reflect in any way upon her, notwithstanding the fact that she lived among people where reputations are torn to shreds upon the slightest provocation.

And now to the tragedy itself.

The performance of the piece called "The Man-hater" occupied about an hour of time.

Supposing the curtain to rise at eight o'clock upon the general performance, "The Man-hater" was produced about half-past eight or a quarter of nine.

In the last scene of "The Man-hater," just before the climax upon which the curtain dropped, a violent quarrel took place between the man and the woman, during which she was supposed to strike at him with a weapon, but in the drama he caught her wrist, whereupon the weapon was permitted to drop to the floor, and then, after a few expostulations and explanations, the piece ended happily, as all presentations should.

On the occasion of the tragedy, this did not take place, as usual.

At the instant when Merrill Gwynn should have seized the actress' wrist and the weapon she held in her hand—a jeweled dagger—should have dropped to the stage harmlessly, the wrist and the descending dagger avoided him, and the blade was buried to the hilt in his bosom so that he fell bleeding to the stage at her feet.

It was remembered by the audience that at the instant when this blow was struck, and Gwynn fell, she released her hand upon the hilt of the weapon, ran swiftly across the stage to what is known as the right first entrance, and disappeared in the wings.

In the meantime, every one who had been standing in the wings—those connected with the theater—perceiving that a tragedy had taken place, and never doubting that it was an accident, rushed forward to the center of the stage where the victim of it had fallen, without giving one thought to the perpetrator.

Merrill Gwynn died almost at once.

When his friends rushed forward to his assistance, he gasped twice, and was heard to utter the name "Carlina"; then a shudder ran through him, and he was dead.

It was found afterward that the dagger had pierced his heart, and the only wonder was that he had not died instantly.

John Coogan, a theatrical agent of Boston, who is known all the way to the Pacific Coast, and from Canada to the Gulf, as a good fellow, happened to be standing in the wings at the left second entrance at the instant that the tragedy occurred, and was the first to reach the side of the stricken man. It was John Coogan who had the booking of this piece, and he happened around at the theater on this particular evening for the purpose of holding a business conversation with Merrill Gwynn as soon as the act should be finished.

It was Coogan, therefore, who heard the muttered word which pronounced a name from the lips of the dying man, and instantly it came upon him like a flash that the blow which had killed Gwynn could not have been the result of an accident, but must have been dealt with deliberate design and intent to do murder.

It was, therefore, only a second or two after Gwynn fell back dead that Coogan leaped to his feet, and, calling to the stage-manager of the theater to follow him, ran to Carlina Carroll's dressing-room in search of her.

The curtain in the meantime had been rung down, and, although the audience realized that something entirely out of the ordinary had happened, there was no one there apparently who really appreciated what had occurred.

There was a ripple of excitement, to be sure, but the ushers went about quieting them, with the result that they retained their seats and awaited some announcement from the footlights.

When Coogan, followed by the stage-manager, reached the door of Carlina Carroll's dressing-room, not more than three minutes could have elapsed since the murderous blow had been dealt; but already, from his own view of the tragedy obtained from his position in the wings, Coogan was convinced that Carlina had struck Gwynn purposely, and with the intention of killing him.

What was his astonishment, therefore, when, upon throwing open the door of her dressing-room, he found her seated calmly under a screened light that was pendent over her table looking over the pictures of an illustrated weekly that she held in her hand.

She looked so entirely unconscious of the calamity that had occurred that Coogan and the stage-manager stopped upon the threshold of the door for a moment dismayed.

"Carlina, what does this mean?" cried Coogan desperately.

The actress raised her blue eyes calmly to Coogan's face, and, with a shrug of her plump shoulders, replied:

"What does what mean, Johnny?"

"Why did you strike Gwynn?" he demanded.

She shrugged her shoulders again, and turned another leaf of the illustrated weekly.

"Why?" she asked, and she tilted herself a little bit back in her chair, indifferently.

In the meantime the stage-manager had thrust himself forward, and now he seized Carlina impatiently by the arm and shook her.

"You have murdered him!" he cried out.

Carlina shook herself free from the grasp with some show of petulance, and exclaimed:

"What is the matter with you two, anyway?"

"We want to know why you struck Gwynn? Why you stabbed him? He's dead, confound you; have you no realization of what you have done?" cried Coogan.

She leaped to her feet now, for the expression in the

face of the two men told her plainly enough—if she had not known before—that something had happened, and it was her turn to cry out:

"What do you mean?"

It was Coogan who replied.

"Gwynn is dead—murdered—struck down by your hand—stabbed to the heart by your property dagger. You killed him. Why did you do it? Are you mad, Carlina; crazy?"

She did not answer.

Her eyes gradually widened with horror, peered keenly into the face of Coogan, then sought the stage-manager's, and then returned again to Coogan, and for the space of perhaps ten seconds there was utter silence in that small dressing-room.

And then, without a word of warning, but with a muttered "My God!" she sank at their feet, limp and lifeless, in a dead faint.

For a moment the two men stood over her, looking down in consternation upon her senseless form, and then they sought each other's eyes in unconcealed dismay.

"Danny," said Coogan, and his voice had the sound of a stage whisper, "what do you suppose it all means?"

"You can search me," replied Danny, shoving his hands deeply into his pockets, and for once in his life at least incapable of words.

Outside, in the meantime, the excitement had increased. By outside we do not mean in the audience, but on the stage behind the lowered curtain.

The body of Merrill Gwynn had been carried into his dressing-room, and while some of the performers engaged at the theater worked over it in the vain hope of bringing the man back to life, others dashed after Coogan and Danny, and still others, two or three, hurried to the street and called a policeman.

When he came there were tongues enough to tell him in a very short time all that had occurred, and so it was that, just at the moment of utter consternation between Coogan and Danny in Carlina Carroll's dressing-room, the door was thrown violently open a second time, and the huge form of a uniformed policeman crossed the threshold.

And this was the tragedy behind the footlights.

CHAPTER II.

A WOMAN'S STRANGE STORY.

It will not be necessary for us to go into the details of the resultant consequences that followed immediately upon this tragedy.

It was only natural, of course, that Carlina Carroll was arrested and taken to prison, and that on the following morning when she was haled before a magistrate, she was remanded to prison without bail, charged with murder.

It was a mere incident in the life around the courts and prisons of the city that she insisted upon her innocence, but acting upon the advice of counsel, which had been provided at once for her by her husband, she at first refused to make any statement whatever.

James Carroll, her husband, was not a witness to the tragedy, and this fact was perhaps an unfortunate one for his wife, although there were others, and they were largely in the majority, who insisted that it was the best thing that ever happened to Jim Carroll that he was not present when his wife murdered Merrill Gwynn before an audience of two thousand people.

But the fact remained that at the moment of the tragedy James Carroll, in company with three boon companions, was standing peacefully against the bar of an adjoining saloon sipping a cocktail.

It was a habit of his that he was always ready to step outside of the theater for this purpose, and fate had arranged it so that this tragedy should occur at one of the times when he was passing from the wings.

It may, therefore, be said that he knew nothing actually about the occurrence.

It must be said of James Carroll that in his own heart he did not for a moment doubt but that his wife had struck the blow which killed Merrill Gwynn; but neither did he doubt that it was an accident, and the first opportunity he had of conversation with her after her arrest, he besought her in pleading terms to tell the truth of the matter, and relate exactly how it had occurred, instead of insisting upon the false position she had assumed; that she did not do the deed and knew nothing about it.

"I wasn't there, I wasn't there at all," was all that Carlina could or would reply at the time; and this included all the statement that she made relative to the tragedy until the afternoon of the day following her arrest.

Then, acting upon the advice of her counsel, she gave out a brief statement, through him, which was as follows:

"Carlina Carroll was not on the stage at the time that the tragedy had occurred. Without the knowledge of any one connected with the theater she had bargained with another woman, a stranger, and for a substantial price had consented that this stranger should take her place last night during that particular scene of the last act of 'The Man-hater.' Mrs. Carroll, therefore, had no knowledge whatever of the tragedy until the instant when Coogan and the stage-manager dashed into her dressing-room, unannounced, and informed her of it. That is all the statement she will make at the present time. The rest of it will appear later at the trial, perhaps, if this case is ever brought to trial against her, which fact is not likely to happen."

This statement given out by Carlina's counsel appeared in the afternoon and evening papers of that day; but it

was noised about and told among her friends and acquaintances long before it appeared in print, and it is only fair to say here that there was not one among them all who believed it—not even James Carroll, her husband.

The police were very busy the night of the tragedy and the following day, and the detective force exerted itself to the utmost to find out everything that could be ascertained relative to the relations heretofore existing between the dead man and Carlina Carroll, in the belief that something would be exposed which would explain the motive for the murder.

In the mind of John Coogan alone of all her friends there lingered a doubt of Carlina's guilt.

The story she had told through her lawyer about the strange woman that had been permitted to enact her part in that scene had at first impressed him exactly as it did the others.

But Coogan could not forget the impression that was made upon him by Carlina Carroll's manner at the moment, when, followed by the stage-manager, Danny, he entered her dressing-room immediately after the tragedy.

He argued with himself that there was no guilt there, or, if there were, she was a much better and more finished actress than he had ever supposed her to be.

The mere idea that she could be seated where she was, apparently entirely unconcerned, engaged in idly looking over the pictures of an illustrated paper so soon after driving a dagger into the heart of one of her best friends, was preposterous.

And he remembered that her manner at that moment, and during the few seconds that succeeded it, had been that of entire ignorance, as well as innocence; and he recalled now, in detail, every motion and gesture and expression of face and eyes at that time, from the instant he had entered the room until she sank in a dead faint at his feet upon the floor.

And the result of all this was that John Coogan was the only person who believed that it might, after all, be true that Carlina Carroll was not on the stage at the time the tragedy occurred; and he decided that, no matter what might come of it, he at least would give her the benefit of the doubt until there was some proof concerning the matter one way or the other; and that is why he sent a telegram to Nick Carter, advising him of the affair, and begging him, for the sake of their long friendship, to come to Boston at once.

It was in the afternoon of the day following the tragedy, and soon after the statement of Carlina Carroll was given to the public, that Coogan, through some of the officials among whom he had influence, secured an interview with Carlina in the counsel-room of the prison.

She was brought to his presence by one of the turnkeys of the prison, who remained just outside the grated door of the room while they conversed; and Coogan was shocked at the great change which had taken place in the young woman's appearance during the short time that had elapsed since he saw her.

But Coogan was always intensely practical in his manner and in his methods, and he lost no time now over useless sentimentality. His idea was that the truth of this matter must be got at as soon as possible; and so it was that he spoke rather bruskly to her.

"Carlina," he said, "I want you to tell me the truth about this other woman business. It's a pretty strange story, you must know, and it is just as well that you should understand at the start that there isn't anybody who believes it. If it is true, I want you to convince me of it, if you can. I am willing to be convinced, but I want you to understand that when I first heard it I thought it about the flimsiest explanation that I have ever heard; but I'm your friend, and I'm going to be your friend to the end of this business.

"I have sent to New York for the best detective that this country ever saw. I am going to put him on this case at my own expense, and I'm going to see it through, somehow. I'm going to prove, before I'm finished, for my own satisfaction, if for no other reason, one of two things, that you murdered Merrill Gwynn, or that you did not.

"And, now, if there is any way in your power to convince me that your story about the other woman is true, or has any foundation in fact, I want to know it. And if there is another woman, and she can be traced out and found and made to answer for what she has done, I promise you that Nick Carter will find her. Now, Carlina, was there another woman, yes or no?"

"There was another woman," was the low-toned reply from Carlina Carroll.

She had listened without once attempting to interrupt the rather long speech that Coogan made to her, and throughout it her manner had been one of quiet resignation rather than of resentment.

"Will you swear to me that you did not strike Merrill Gwynn with the dagger?" asked Coogan.

"I will so swear," she replied, in the same low tone as she had used before.

"Will you swear to me, Carlina, that you were not on the stage at the time the murder occurred?"

"I do so swear."

"Will you swear to me, on everything that you hold dear and holy, that you gave up your place at that time to another woman who had purchased from you the privilege of enacting your part?"

"I do so swear on everything that I hold dear and holy."

"Then, Carlina, for God's sake, tell me, who was the other woman?"

"Alas!" she said, "I do not know."

"But who was she? Where did she come from? What was her name? What was the name she gave

you? What was she there for? Why did she wish to enact your part? The whole thing is so absurd, Carlina, so utterly unbelievable, so apparently manufactured, so unheard of, that it is incredible on the face of it. Isn't there some way by which you can establish the truth of what you say?"

Carlina Carroll shook her head in silence.

"No," she said, in that same quiet resignation in making that statement. "I have told you all that I know about her. I have no proofs."

"But there must be some proof," insisted Coogan. "Didn't she give you a name?"

"Yes," replied Carlina, "I knew her as Miss Maynard."

"What was she? Was she an actress?"

"I knew her only as Miss Maynard."

"Where does she live?"

"I do not know. I asked her once, and she told me it made no difference. I did not insist."

"And she paid you for this privilege?"

"Yes."

"How much?"

"A thousand dollars."

"Carlina, do you expect anybody to believe such a story as that?"

"No," she replied wearily.

"Have you got the thousand dollars? The possession of that would be some proof of your statement, for I know, and everybody who is familiar with you knows, that you were not in the habit of carrying that much money around with you."

"She gave me the money when she came last night, after I had assisted her to dress for the part," said Carlina slowly. "I put it under my make-up box on the table in my dressing-room. It was a thousand-dollar bill. I suppose it is there yet. I had utterly forgotten it."

"I'll find out mighty quick," said Coogan, and he leaped to his feet, called to the turnkey to let him out, and hurried into the street and toward the theater.

CHAPTER III.

THE MYSTERY OF THE CRIME.

Nick Carter arrived in the city of Boston about twenty-four hours after the strange murder of Merrill Gwynn, and he went at once to Coogan's office in Court Street, where the latter was awaiting him.

"It was fortunate that your message found me at home," the detective said to his friend, after the usual greetings had been exchanged, "for I was on the point of going away on a short vacation. If your wire had arrived three hours later it would not have caught me. Now, tell me what it is all about."

"It is murder," said Coogan, "and the most incomprehensible——"

"Cut all that out," interrupted the detective, "and get down to facts. Tell me the story in detail, as you know it, from beginning to end, afterward I will ask you such questions as occur to me."

Coogan began at the beginning then, and related the story as we already know it, telling no more, and no less, for the reason that he knew no more, and there could not have been much less to tell.

"You see, Nick," he said, at the conclusion of his recital, "that the story told by Carlina is about as flimsy a yarn as one could well imagine, and yet—I have been arguing myself into this condition of mind—it is only fair to myself and to her to tell you right now that, notwithstanding the fact that every appearance is against the truth of it, and I cannot find one single circumstance to support it, I believe it."

"That's good," said Nick. "Does she know that you believe her?"

"No."

"Why haven't you told her?"

"Merely because I haven't seen her since I came to the conclusion that I did believe."

"What reasons have you for believing her?"

Coogan was silent a moment, and then he answered slowly:

"There are several reasons, I suppose, when one comes to analyze them, but I think that the principal one comes from her attitude, the expression of her face, of her entire demeanor, at the moment when I rushed into her dressing-room and charged her with the crime."

"Possibly," said Nick, "she was awaiting that particular crisis, and had schooled herself to meet it?"

Coogan nodded.

"I thought of that," he said. "I thought of it a good many times, and thoroughly believed that to be the case at first, but I am convinced now that it was not the case, and that at the moment she was as ignorant of the crime as you were."

"Go on," said Nick. "What other reasons have you got for believing her story, which, as you say, borders on the preposterous?"

"Well, there's my knowledge of the woman herself. She's a good woman, Nick, and I know it, and this profession of ours isn't generally supposed to be overrun with good women. There are loads of them in it, but there are loads of them who are not. But Carlina Carroll is a good woman, and I know it. I have known her, together with Jimmy, who is her husband, and Merrill Gwynn, poor chap, for ten years. I know, as positively as any one outside their immediate circle could know, that there was never anything between Gwynn and Carlina, and that there has never been the shadow of a rupture between Merrill Gwynn and Jimmy; and James Carroll is not the man who would stand for any funny business. I speak of all this, because in my own mind, at

least, it proves—that is, it is positive proof to me personally—that Carlina Carroll could have had no reason and no motive for killing Merrill Gwynn."

The detective was thoughtful for a moment, then he asked:

"Isn't it possible that the whole thing might have been the result of an accident, and that the consequences of it so terrified Carlina that she resorted to this terrible tale to explain it, fearing that she could not establish the truth of an accidental slip?"

Coogan shook his head emphatically.

"It doesn't wash," he said. "Carlina isn't the woman to do that sort of thing. I don't think myself that she possesses what you might call that sort of intelligence; besides, I have always known her to be absolutely truthful. She is the sort of person who will tell the plain truth at times when something that is not the exact truth would serve a good deal better."

Nick Carter was silent for some time, and then he remarked:

"I am sifting this part of the tragedy first, before touching upon the possible truth of her statement about the other woman, for the reason that I want to dispose of the natural theory before we take up the unnatural one. Now, in your opinion, could such a thing happen by accident?"

"Never, in a thousand years," was the emphatic reply.

"Where were you at the time of the tragedy?" asked the detective.

"I was right there, standing in the wings, at the left second entrance."

"Then you saw it?"

"Yes. I saw it."

"Saw the blow when it was struck?"

"Yes."

"Do you mean to tell me that you were looking at the two actors on the stage at the very instant when the blow fell?"

"I was."

"Tell me what was your first impression when you saw it? The very first impression that you received."

"Horror."

"What did you do?"

"Nothing. I stood as if I had been terrorized, and I suppose I remained so for two or three seconds before I moved."

"And then what did you do?"

"I sprang forward to the assistance of Gwynn, who had already fallen to the stage."

"And what became of the woman?"

"She disappeared."

"Where, and how, and when?"

"To tell you the truth, Nick, I don't know. I was so shocked and horrified by what had happened that I think I lost my senses for a moment. My recollection is, and it is supported by the statement of others who were there, that the instant she struck the blow she ran across the stage, and left it by the right first entrance, and that, so far as I know, is the last that was seen of her by anybody—of course, until I went into Carlina's dressing-room, followed by Danny."

"We are talking now on the supposition that it was Carlina on the stage when the blow was struck. Did you believe it to be Carlina," asked Nick sharply.

"I certainly did."

"At the moment you stood in the wings at the left second entrance—I mean the moment which just preceded the tragedy itself—had you any doubt, or had it occurred to you even vaguely that there could be any doubt, that it was Carlina Carroll who was on the stage then with Merrill Gwynn?"

"None whatever."

"Were the voice and gestures the same as Carlina's?"

"Exactly the same, so far as I was, or am, able to determine."

"And the general appearance?"

"Precisely the same."

"Height, build, deportment, manner, gestures, walk, voice, everything about her was to you the same as Carlina's?"

"If there was any difference," was the quiet reply, "I did not see it."

"Now tell me," said Nick, "what are your stage-door arrangements?"

"I don't think I quite understand the question," said Coogan.

"I mean, would it have been possible for such a woman as Carlina describes to have passed in at the stage-door without being stopped or noticed by the doorman?"

"In a general way, I should reply no," said Coogan. "And I have already questioned the doorman on that very point. He does not remember that any one passed in or out of the theater, at or near that time, who would answer in any way to the description of such a person."

"Would it have been possible for any one to have gotten past him without his knowledge?"

"Hardly that. And still there are times, of course, when he is absent for a moment from his post, although he insists that while the woman might have come in by the stage-door at or near the time when the performers were arriving without his seeing her or taking notice of her—while he admits that that is a possibility, without being probable—he denies absolutely that it would have been possible for her to have left the theater by the stage-door without his knowing it after the tragedy occurred."

Nick shook his head.

"I suppose," he said, "that there was a general uproar behind the scenes immediately following the murder, was there not?"

"Oh, yes, of course there was excitement."

"Don't you suppose that the doorman rushed in upon the stage himself to find out what had happened?"

"I asked him that question, and he says that he did not."

"Isn't there a way from the stage into the theater behind the boxes at that house?" asked the detective.

"Yes."

"Might she not have escaped in that way, if there was such a woman?"

"It is possible," admitted Coogan.

"If she escaped in that way, is it not also possible that she entered that way?" asked Nick.

"Yes; only for the fact that the door which connects between the stage and the theater through a passage-way behind the boxes is always locked by a spring-lock, which snaps when the door is closed."

The detective shook his shoulders and smiled.

"A very ordinary spring-lock, I suppose?"

Coogan nodded.

"One for which a duplicate key could easily be obtained?" the detective continued.

"Yes."

"Now, Johnny, are you quite sure that no reason exists why Carlina Carroll should wish to kill Merrill Gwynn?"

"Why, Nick, I am just as positive about that as I am that I am sitting here in this office facing you."

"Might it not have been a moment of madness? Has there ever been anything strange in the appearance of Carlina Carroll, or in her conduct, that you have noticed?"

"Not a thing, Nick. That view of it is entirely out of the question."

"Tell me something about Merrill Gwynn," said the detective.

"What do you want to know about him?"

"Well, what sort of a chap was he, personally, I mean?"

"They don't make them any better, Nick."

"What was his general course of conduct where women were concerned?"

"About as exemplary as any man I ever met. He was as free from entanglements of that sort as any man I ever knew in the profession; in fact, if he ever had one at all, I not only don't know it, but I never heard of it."

"Married," asked Nick.

"No."

"Was he ever married?"

"Not that I know of."

"Did I understand you to say that you have known him for ten years?"

"Yes. On and off."

"Intimately?"

"Why, yes; as intimately as one could know another man he sees; but, really, it is only within the last season that I have seen much of Gwynn, although there never has been an entire season when I have not met him several times, but during this one that we are now in the middle of, he has been under my management; that is, I have done his booking for him."

The detective smiled.

"Then, as a matter of fact," he said, "although you think that you know Merrill Gwynn intimately, the truth is, that you know nothing about him at all. You saw him occasionally, more often recently than formerly, and were on terms of familiarity when you did see each other, which you call intimacy; and you have convinced yourself that you know all there was to know about him; as a matter of fact, you have all along known next to nothing about him. Isn't that true?"

"I suppose it is," admitted Coogan.

The detective threw away his cigar, and, rising, said:

"There is always a woman in the life of a man. When a man's apparent life is so exemplary that he apparently pays no attention to the women who surround him it is always pretty good proof that there is a woman in his past. I think in this case, if we determine that Carlina Carroll's story is worthy of credence, we will find that there has been a woman in Merrill Gwynn's past; but I must see and talk with Carlina Carroll as soon as possible; and now, if you will take me to the theater, I would like to investigate the surroundings of the tragedy."

CHAPTER IV.

THE MISSING THOUSAND-DOLLAR BILL.

The detective timed himself so that he arrived at the theater a few minutes only before it closed, and, piloted by Coogan, he entered at the stage-door.

As soon as he was inside, having been vouched for by Coogan, he told the latter to go on into the wings, and await him there, while he himself paused a moment to confer with the doorman.

"I have come," he said, "to find out all that I can about this unfortunate tragedy that occurred here last night, and I wish that you would answer a few questions for me."

"With pleasure, sir," was the instant reply.

"The first and most natural question," continued the detective, "is, do you know, or can you remember whether any person not connected with the theater entered at this door last night?"

"I am positive that no such person came in here," was the emphatic response.

"What time did you come on duty at this door last night?" asked the detective.

"At seven o'clock," was the reply. "I relieve the regular watchman."

"And how long did you remain here on duty?"

"Until we closed the house last night, and it was somewhat later than usual, owing to the death of Mr. Gwynn."

"Were you absent from your post at any time between seven o'clock and the time you left the theater for the night?"

"No, sir; that is, there was no time when I was more than twenty feet away from this door, and no time when I was off my stool here at the desk for more than a minute at a time."

"Do you think it possible," asked Nick, "that any stranger—any strange woman, I mean—could have passed you last night? This question is not asked with the purpose of getting you into any trouble; it is asked because I want to know the truth."

"I am very positive, sir," was the honest reply, "that such a thing did not happen."

"There is another view that we might take of it," said the detective.

"Yes, sir; what is that?"

"Is there any person, any woman, not connected with the show, who has been in the habit of coming here and passing inside freely to see any member of the company?"

"No, sir."

"If you were called to the stand in court to give testimony in this matter, would you, on oath, swear to exactly what you have told me now?"

"I would, sir, without any change whatever."

"And it would be to your interest, would it not, to tell me frankly and freely of anything that you do know that might be of assistance in this search?"

"Certainly, sir."

"Then," said Nick, "I have only one thing to remind you of, and that is this: If, while you turn over in your mind all of the incidents of yesterday, and of the days of this week that preceded it, anything should occur to you which you think might interest me, no matter how trivial it may seem to you, will you inform me about it?"

"I will, sir."

The detective passed inside.

The curtain had been dropped over the last scene of that afternoon's performance, for the tragedy of the preceding night had not closed the theater, and, in fact, the auditorium had been packed this afternoon to its utmost capacity by people who had been drawn hither by morbid curiosity to behold the scene of the murder.

"The play known as "The Man-hater" was, of course, withdrawn, and other acts had been substituted in its place.

As soon as the detective could call the people on the stage about him, he requested them for his especial benefit to enact the scene of the tragedy for him as perfectly as they could, and when several volunteered readily to do so, Coogan, by Nick's direction, placed the actors on the stage in the relative positions that had been occupied by Gwynn and Carlina Carroll, and by the people who were standing in the wings at the time the tragedy occurred.

And then, under Coogan's supervision, the entire scene was reenacted, while Nick stood silently down the stage in front of them, watching with interest everything that was done.

The positions in the middle of the stage occupied by the two principals of the tragedy was directly in front of him. The blow was struck. The man who played the part of Gwynn fell to the stage. The woman who struck the blow in place of Carlina Carroll fled to the right first entrance and disappeared. Coogan and Danny and others rushed from various wings toward the prostrate man on the floor, and then, to make the enactment still more realistic, Coogan leaped to his feet, as he had done the preceding night, and, followed by Danny, rushed to the dressing-room door of the star performer.

Nick thanked them all for their interest in the matter, and then while they all gathered around him he took occasion to question them closely concerning the habits and the characters of the principals in the tragedy, and the general opinion that had been formed of them by the members of the company.

He found in all this nothing to modify the statements that had already been made to him by Coogan, and again thanking them, he turned his attention to the door and passageway of communication between the stage and the theater proper.

This he found to be a door which gave entrance from the stage upon a narrow passageway behind the entrance to the proscenium-boxes on the parquet floor.

This door, as Coogan had described it to him, was supplied with an ordinary spring-lock, which snapped into place whenever the door was closed; and to the door there was attached a spring, which always pulled it shut with sufficient force to snap the lock, so that when any one passed through it, even if they neglected to turn and close the door, it would shut itself and become fastened.

Nick and Coogan went around together to Young's Hotel, which was where the detective had taken a room for the night, and where now they ordered some supper.

"If there is another woman in the case," said the detective, across the table to his companion, "it is plain that she entered and left the theater through that proscenium-door. It is on the left side of the theater from the auditorium, and is, therefore, close to the right first entrance of the stage, according to stage parlance. It would have required but an instant for her—if there was such a woman—after she escaped through the right first entrance, following upon the commission of the crime, to have opened and passed through that door and closed it after her, if she were provided with a key."

"All that is quite true," admitted Coogan, "only it seems to me that there is one thing you forget."

"What is that?" asked Nick.

"Supposing, for the sake of argument—and I am quite willing to admit it—that there was such a woman, and that she was on the stage at the time in place of Carlina, you must remember that she had on her make-up, that she was without a hat or wrap of any kind, and must have attracted attention if she ran through that door into the theater immediately after the commission of the crime."

"No," said Nick, "I do not agree with you."

"Why?" asked Coogan.

"There are several reasons, Johnny. In the first place, you must remember that if a woman had planned a coup of this kind she would have prepared for it in every detail. There would, for example, have been in her possession a cloth and a small bottle of alcohol, with which she quickly could have effaced the most glaring marks of her make-up. Again, to represent Carlina Carroll as perfectly as she must have done, she must have worn a wig, which she could readily remove, and have pressed it into a small compass, and concealed it somewhere in her apparel. Again, the passageway into the theater from the stage leads directly behind the entrance to the boxes, and at the far end of it there is a curtain. It would have been an easy matter for her to have paused there a moment long enough to have adjusted hat and veil, and to have thrown a cloak about her shoulders, and after that it would have been a very simple matter for her to have passed out through the theater behind the seats of the parquet circle at the time when the ushers were going about among the audience quieting the people, and when every interest and attention was centered upon the mystery of the tragedy which had just occurred. If there was another woman, Johnny, I have described just about how she escaped."

"But how did she get into the theater at all?" asked Coogan.

"Only by deliberately planning over every act of this scene as I have described it, and she must have possessed a key to that door. It could be opened without a key from the inside, but a key is necessary to pass from the theater upon the stage. The lock is a very simple one, and if she was some time in arranging her plans for what was done last night, it was merely an incident to them to procure a key."

Coogan nodded, and made no reply.

"And now, Johnny," said the detective, "I want you to tell me something about your interview with Carlina Carroll."

"What about it?" asked Coogan.

"Well, for instance, what reason did she give you for permitting this woman to appear in her place?"

"I told you the story when you first got here to-night," said Coogan, rather shortly.

"Yes," said Nick, smiling. "You don't suppose that you quite fooled me, did you, Johnny? Don't you think that I understood perfectly well that there was something about that story that you held back from me? What would be the very first question that you would ask Carlina about such a thing? Wouldn't it be exactly that question that I asked you just now? What was her reason for permitting a strange woman to substitute herself for that act? Wasn't there a money consideration?"

It should be remarked here that Coogan, for reasons of his own, which were induced by his loyalty to Carlina Carroll, and his friendship for her, and also because he had succeeded in convincing himself that she had told him the truth, had not told Nick Carter about that mysterious one-thousand-dollar bill.

It will be remembered how abruptly he left Carlina's presence at the prison, and hastened to the theater in order to find the money she had described. At the moment he believed that the presence of the thousand-dollar bill under the make-up box on the table in the dressing-room would be sufficient proof to him, at least, of the truth of Carlina's story.

But the one-thousand-dollar bill was not there.

He had searched under the make-up box, and he had searched the room itself in every corner; and every possible hiding-place he had ransacked from top to bottom, and from end to end, and no one-thousand-dollar bill had appeared.

And the result was that, notwithstanding Coogan's loyalty to the sacred friendship that he had felt always for Carlina Carroll, he still found it impossible to explain to his own satisfaction this discrepancy in the story she had told.

In his conversation with Nick Carter he had omitted it, to his credit, be it said.

But now he explained it fully, and at the end of his remarks Nick said quietly, while he stirred his coffee:

"To-morrow morning, in good season, Johnny, I will interview Carlina Carroll; after that, we will see—what we will see."

CHAPTER V.

MISS MAYNARD, THE UNKNOWN.

Carlina Carroll had recovered somewhat her natural poise of manner during the thirty-six hours that had elapsed since the tragedy at the theater, and when she was ushered into the private quarters of the warden of the prison where, at Nick's express request, she was brought to him, there was something of her old fascination about her, which had rendered her always so successful in her profession.

It will be remembered that Coogan had told her of the fact that he had sent to New York for Nick Carter, and, as a drowning person catches at the proverbial straw, she had clung to the memory of the utterance of that name with gradual growing hope until she had arrived at the

condition of mind where she was convinced that her salvation existed only in the detective's efforts.

And so it was that when she was summoned to him, and knew that it was Nick Carter whom she was to meet, her spirits rose at once to the occasion, and she no longer felt the utter hopelessness of her case, as she had done until that moment.

By Nick Carter's request the two were left entirely alone together.

The warden had courteously given up his own parlor to the interview, and, therefore, there was nothing about the surroundings to depress Carlina, or to remind her of the fact that she was a prisoner, without bail, charged with murder.

"I am Nick Carter," the detective said to her, by way of introduction, "and I have no doubt that Mr. Coogan has already informed you of my expected arrival, and also of my interest in your affairs. I have come to you now, Mrs. Carroll, prepared to say to you in the beginning that I am willing to accept without reservation the story you have told about the unknown woman in connection with this crime—that I am willing to accept it as truth, but that you must tell me, unreservedly, everything that you know concerning that woman from the beginning of your acquaintance with her up to the moment when you last saw her."

Carlina bowed her head gracefully, and the ghost of a smile played for an instant about her features.

"I will do my best," she said in reply, "only I am afraid there is very little to tell."

"Even that little," returned the detective, "may be of the utmost importance to us; but before we proceed I must ask you a few blunt questions."

"Yes," she said, "I am ready to answer anything you ask."

"To begin, then, I am to understand that you emphatically declare yourself innocent in this matter. Is that correct?"

"It is. I did not kill Merrill Gwynn, if that is what you mean."

"Yes, that is what I mean. Now, what were your relations with Merrill Gwynn?"

"In what way, sir?" she asked.

"In every way."

"My relations were exactly those which exist between two thorough-going friends. No more, and no less."

"Was there ever any question of affection between you which amounted to more than mere friendship?" the detective asked bluntly.

"There was never even a suggestion of such a thing."

"By word or deed?"

"Never by word or deed."

"You respected the man?"

"Yes, entirely."

"And was fond of him?"

"I was always fond of him. He was to me more like a brother than anything else. My husband and Merrill Gwynn were always the best of friends. In him I had a good friend, as in James Carroll I have an excellent husband."

"Has there never been any discord between you and Merrill Gwynn?"

"There have been discords; there never are friends who get along without discordant notes in their lives, are there?"

"Rarely," agreed Nick, smiling. "But what I want to know is: Was there any sign of any discord between you the day before yesterday at all?"

"None whatever."

"When the curtain rose upon your act, you were as friendly as you ever had been?"

"Quite so."

"Did you know when the curtain did go up on your act last night that this strange woman who had prevailed upon you to permit her to take your place during one of the scenes would appear at the theater before your act was over?"

"I knew that she might do so. I was not positive about it."

"When were you first made positive of it?"

"When she did make her appearance."

"And when was that?"

"It was during the interval which occurs just prior to the scene during which Merrill Gwynn was killed, when I am off the stage for nine minutes. I took occasion then to go to my dressing-room. I found Miss Maynard waiting for me when I got there."

"Did you expect to find her there?"

"No; I did not expect to find here there, but I thought it possible that she might be there."

"And was it because you thought it possible that she might be there that you went to your dressing-room?"

"Not directly because of that, for during that interval I invariably go to my dressing-room in order to give a touch or two to my make-up."

"You tell me that the period during which you were off the stage before you returned to it is nine minutes?"

"Yes."

"And now I am to understand that instead of returning to the stage to finish the act at the expiration of that nine minutes, the woman whom you call Miss Maynard went there in your place?"

"Yes."

"Was there not some preparation necessary for her to make before she could do so?"

"In what way do you mean, Mr. Carter?"

"I mean, was she made up and ready to make her appearance on the stage?"

"She was."

"Costume, make-up, everything in readiness?"

"Everything."

"Even to a wig which resembled your own head-dress?"

"Yes, if it is a wig, which I doubt. I may say right here, Mr. Carter, that while there is not enough likeness between Miss Maynard and myself to be confusing, there is a strong resemblance between us."

"But," said Nick quickly, "is that resemblance strong enough to have deceived Merrill Gwynn?"

"No, I do not think so."

"Do you suppose that when this woman went on the stage in your place that he could have had any doubt that she was some one who had been substituted in your place?"

"No. He must have known the difference instantly. But, Mr. Carter, you must understand that he had not left the stage, but was continuing with the act. There was no opportunity for him to raise any objection had he thought of doing so. There was absolutely nothing for him to do but to accept matters as they were, and to proceed with the act to the end.

"And also, Mr. Carter, you must further understand that the deception as it was practised would not be at all likely to be noticed from the wings. The make-up of the woman was so exactly like my own. Her height was the same, and her gestures and manner were the same, because I had trained her in them, and, therefore, the people in the wings who might have been looking on at the scene would not have noticed, unless she had made some flagrant error or change in the act, that there was any difference. I don't know that you are accustomed to the theater behind the scenes, sir; but if you are, you also know that very little attention is paid to what is going on on the stage by those who are behind, even if they stand in the wings watching. They are usually conversing in low tones among themselves. I knew of this when I consented to this imposition, and I—perhaps I trained Miss Maynard the better for it, because to me the whole thing appeared in the light of a joke, and Miss Maynard certainly made an effort to impress me with the belief that she so regarded it herself."

"All that is very clear," said the detective; "but, now, did you ever say anything about this woman, or her wishes, to Merrill Gwynn?"

"No."

"He knew nothing of your intention about the substitution?"

"Nothing at all."

"Will you tell me why you did not tell him of it?"

"I did not tell him because I knew that he would not consent to it. He would have thought at once that it could not be carried through. It would have made him nervous in his own part, and—I decided that it was better that he should know nothing about it until she appeared unannounced before him, when it was too late for him to make any objection."

"Did you have no misgivings when you permitted that woman to take your place?"

"No; I had gone through the act with her—or, at least, through that part of the act—many times. I knew that she was proficient in it, and could do it every bit as well as I."

"You parted with her in your own dressing-room?"

"Yes."

"You did not follow her out of the dressing-room?"

"No."

"What did you do?"

"I closed the door, and sat upon a chair by my table, and picked up a copy of an illustrated paper, which was lying there."

"Was that the paper you were looking at when Johnny Coogan and the stage-manager entered the room?"

"Yes."

"You had not changed your position materially since the woman left you?"

"No."

"What were your arrangements with her concerning what was to happen afterward?"

"I don't understand you."

"Was she to return to your dressing-room after her performance on the stage?"

"Yes; that was the understanding."

"And for all this substitution of herself for you, she was to pay you money?"

"Yes."

"How much money?"

"One thousand dollars."

"When was she to pay you the money?"

"She had paid me the money then and there. She brought it with her."

"How much money was it, and in what shape was it?"

"It was a one-thousand-dollar bill."

"And did she give it to you before she left the dressing-room?"

"She did."

"What did you do with it?"

"I put it on the table, under my make-up box."

"Have you seen that one-thousand-dollar bill since you put it there?"

"I have not."

"Why did you put it under the make-up box, instead of placing it in your purse, or anywhere for safe-keeping?"

"I don't know. It was an impulse. She was present with me at the time, of course. I put it where I did merely to get it out of sight, nothing more."

"And nothing happened after she went out that you recall?"

"Nothing happened at all until Mr. Coogan burst into

the room with the information that Merrill Gwynn had been murdered. That is all I know, and I am as innocent of the crime, Mr. Carter, as you are."

CHAPTER VI.

A WOMAN'S SCHEME OF MURDER.

The detective rose and crossed the floor twice with his head bowed, and his hands clasped behind him, after which he resumed his chair and continued:

"Now, madam, when was the first time that you ever saw this woman whom you call Miss Maynard?"

"It was about a month ago," she replied.

"Where was it?"

"At my rooms at the Chippendale apartments, on Columbus Avenue."

"Did you ever know her before that time?"

"Never."

"What was the occasion of that first meeting?"

"She came to see me, that was all."

"Without announcement of any kind, or introduction?"

"She had previously written me a letter."

"Ah! And have you that letter?"

"I do not think so. My impression is that I destroyed it."

"That is too bad. Do you remember its contents?"

"It announced merely that she was a stranger to me, but that she wished to call upon me in reference to a matter which she deemed of importance, and she hoped I would not decline to receive her when she came. It was a very formal note; a very courteous and dignified one, and I felt not the slightest objection to receiving her; therefore, when her card was sent to me, I had her shown to the apartment at once."

"Now, describe to me as well as you can the first impression that she made upon you when she came into your room. I want to know what she looked like, and what your first impression of her was."

"I noticed even then," said Carlina slowly, "that there was something familiar about her. I think that even at that moment she must have reminded me in some vague way of myself, but I will say that I instantly felt an interest in her. When I tell you that she was beautiful to look upon, I hope you will not think that I am including myself in that declaration. That she was beautiful, and also a lady, was plainly to be distinguished in every gesture she made, in every motion of her body, in the way she entered the room, and in the ease with which she adapted herself to the circumstances surrounding her call. My whole impression of her at that very moment was very favorable."

"And you had no idea at that moment of the purpose of her visit to you?"

"None whatever."

"Can you give me some idea of the conversation that occurred between you then and there?"

"Only in a general way. I was standing waiting for her when she entered; I held her card in my hand. She announced that she was Miss Maynard, and hoped that I had received the letter that she had sent to me. I told her I had done so, whereupon she stated that she had come to ask a favor of me, which I would probably consider a very remarkable request, and she hoped I would defer my final decision concerning it until I had heard her through to the end. I asked her to be seated, and waited for her to continue.

"She told me then that all her life she had been interested in the stage. She said that when she was a young girl it had been her ambition to become an actress, and that in pursuit of her ambition she had studied many parts, and had become more or less proficient in them. She told me that she had visited the theater twice where I was acting, and that she had been drawn toward me because she felt as though there was something of harmony between us, as well in our spirits as in our appearance. She made a very graceful apology for that statement, and we both laughed lightly about it.

"Then she told me that she was a rich woman, and that she had foolishly made a wager with one of her society friends that she would appear on the stage as my substitute some night while we were playing there and enact my part, or at least one scene of it, and do it so well, and make-up so exactly like me, that not a person in the audience, save the one with whom she had made the wager, would be the wiser. With that person who was interested in the wager she had agreed upon a signal which she was to make. I paid very little attention to that part of it; the whole proposition struck me as being so utterly ridiculous that at the time I did not even consider it."

"But she succeeded in arguing you into an expression of interest in her plans?"

"Why, yes, I will confess as much. The folly of it struck me as being so utterly ridiculous that I was interested in spite of myself."

"And did she make you an offer of money at that time?"

"Not directly, but by insinuation, yes."

"Tell me how she made it."

"She referred more than once, several times, in fact, to her first statement, that she was a rich woman, and she intimated very plainly that she was quite willing to pay me, and to pay me well for affording her this opportunity, if I would consent to do so."

"And your idea about it——"

"My idea was," replied Carlina, smiling wanly, "that I needed the money, and that if she were willing to pay for such a thing, and could do it well enough so that there would be no trouble about it afterward, I would consent."

"Did she make any mention of giving you any money for your services, and your consent, on the occasion of that first call?"

"Yes. Before she left she did so."

"Tell me about that."

There was now a little hesitation on Carlina's part, and she bit her lips with some confusion; but after a moment she replied:

"It was very foolish of me; I see it now very plainly; but at the time it was all so like a windfall, and it was also so unprecedented, so unusual, so strange, and, withal, so interesting, that I fell. As she was about to take her departure she opened her purse and took from it a roll of money, from which she detached a one-hundred-dollar bill. This she placed in my hand, and while I hesitated to accept it, she resumed gaily: 'And this is only an earnest of what is to come. You must accept this now as payment for the instruction you are to give me in your part, and if, after you have instructed me, you find that I am not competent to take your place in that scene, and you decide to refuse the request I make, this one hundred dollars will be only payment for the trouble I have put you to, and if you should decide that I am competent, and you do consent to my request, I will, on the evening that I assume your place for that one scene, present you with a bill that has three ciphers upon it. In other words, I will give you a thousand-dollar bill."

"It is all very remarkable," said Nick. "Did you make any arrangement for a future meeting?"

"Yes. She was to come to me the following morning at eleven o'clock, and she came."

"And did your instructions to her begin at that time?"

"They did."

"Did you find her an apt pupil?"

"Decidedly so."

"She learned the part readily?"

"She seemed almost to know it without learning it."

"And she was not long in convincing you of her competence?"

"We did not rehearse ten minutes before I was convinced that she could do it as well as I."

"And your rehearsals continued after that?"

"Daily."

"Was it ever discussed between you as to the time she was to appear in the act?"

"Never at all."

"Now, tell me, what reason, if any, other than the one already mentioned of the wager, did she give you for wanting to take your place on the stage?"

"That, and the fact that it had always been her ambition to become an actress, were the only reasons she ever gave."

"And did you always feel satisfied with those reasons?"

"Perfectly."

"You have stated that she wrote you a letter, and that [illegible] her card to you from the called upon you. What name did she sign to the letter, and what name was engraved on her card?"

"Miss Maynard."

"Was there no given name?"

"No."

"No address on the card?"

"None."

"How many times did she come to your rooms for instruction?"

"I think she was there five times in all."

"Consecutively?"

"Yes. Day after day."

"On any of the occasions when she was there did she encounter your husband?"

"No. It was part of the arrangement that she should see nobody; even my maid was never present during our interviews."

"Did she ever mention to you that she had any acquaintance with Merrill Gwynn?"

"No."

"Was Gwynn's name ever mentioned at all between you?"

"Oh, yes, quite frequently. It was necessary that I should mention his name in giving her instructions in the part she was to assume."

"Did she never show or manifest in any way any particular interest in his name, or in him?"

"None that I noticed."

"You say that the first call that she made upon you was a month ago; that she made five calls subsequent to that, during which you gave her instruction. Now, as I understand it, you have been playing at this theater only this week, and that your present engagement began last Monday night."

She interrupted him.

"I know what you mean, Mr. Carter, and I can explain in a few words. You know that we play this circuit continuously for this season. We were here that week a month ago, and our success was so great in that act here in Boston that the management, instead of sending us along the circuit to complete it, returned us to Boston for this week."

"Then I am to assume," said Nick, "that at the time you were giving Miss Maynard her instructions you consumed about the entire week that you were here in doing so?"

"Yes."

"Did she not mention to you at any time the occasion when she wished to take your place on the stage?"

"No. That was to be agreed upon between us later. The time was never set."

"After you left here you played two weeks in other places, did you not?"

"Yes. One week in Pittsburg, and one in New York."

"What was said by Miss Maynard, if anything, when you left Boston that time?"

"I expected her to call upon me, but she did not, and as I heard nothing whatever from her, I decided in my own mind that she had dropped the matter entirely until we returned here last Monday. Then, during the evening she rapped upon my dressing-room door, and entered it while I was making myself ready to go upon the stage."

"You were not expecting her?"

"No."

"And did not hear from her?"

"No."

"How was she dressed at that time she appeared before you so suddenly?"

"Exactly as I was, with the exception of a cloak that she had thrown over her costume. I asked her how she got back on the stage, and she told me she had no difficulty whatever about passing inside, which made me think that the doorman had mistaken her for me, although he must have known that I had come in long before."

"And what did she say to you then about assuming your character in the piece?"

"There was only a moment in which we could converse, for already it was nearly time for me to go on. But she said something about being very glad that I was back, and that I might expect her any night to appear in my dressing-room, ready to proceed. I said something about hoping that she would give me fair warning of her intention, and left her. When I returned to my dressing-room later she was gone, and I did not see her again until the night before last, when she gave me a one-thousand-dollar bill, and I am satisfied now, Mr. Carter, that I have been her dupe from the beginning, and from the very commencement her entire scheme was merely a plot by which she might murder Merrill Gwynn before the eyes of that audience of two thousand people."

CHAPTER VII.

A MAN WITH A PAST.

"I am to understand," said Nick, continuing the subject, "that until she appeared so suddenly in your presence last Monday night, you had decided in your own mind that she had abandoned the original scheme, but that when she reappeared and expressed herself as glad of your return, notifying you that you might expect to see her at any time, you became somewhat uneasy regarding the consequences of what you had done, and that for that very reason you worked yourself into the condition of mind where you expected to see her before you at almost any moment; that is, in the theater, behind the scenes, or in your dressing-room?"

"Just that," said Carlina. "You have described the condition exactly, the proof of it being that I was not surprised when I found her awaiting me in my dressing-room the night before last."

"Now, madam, is that all that you can tell me about this unknown Miss Maynard?"

"That is all. Yes."

"Did she never tell you anything about herself?"

"No, not more than to assure me many times that she was rich. I think that was the only thing about her that I disliked."

"Did you not in any way get the impression that she had some time, somewhere, known Merrill Gwynn?"

"I never even thought of such a thing."

"How would her desire to represent you on the stage affect you had you received such an impression?"

"It would not have affected me at all. I should not have thought anything about it, only that perhaps I might have felt it my duty to secure Gwynn's consent to the act."

"As it was, you did not seem to think that necessary?"

"No. I thought it would be a good joke on him."

"What can you tell me about the past life of Merrill Gwynn?"

"I am afraid that I can tell you nothing about it."

"You have known him a long time?"

"More or less intimately for several years. My husband has known him longer than I have."

"Has he ever been married?"

"I think he has. I do not know."

"Does your husband know?"

"He might. I cannot say."

"Does anything occur to you in association with his name, or his past, which might even vaguely throw any light upon this subject we are discussing?"

"Nothing at all."

"And now I am to conclude that you have told me everything you know concerning this woman?"

"I have told you everything that I know without a single reservation that I am aware of."

"She never by any chance dropped any hint as to where she lived?"

"Not once."

"Do you know if she came to you in a carriage or conveyance of any kind?"

"She always came in an automobile."

"Can you describe it to me?"

"Not more than to tell you it had four wheels. All automobiles look alike to me. And, besides, I only saw it from my window."

"Was there a chauffeur?"

"Yes."

"Did you never see Miss Maynard on the street, or in the stores, or anywhere about the city, save in your own rooms, and at the theater?"

"Never. Only in those places."

"Can you give me an idea as to her age?"

"I should say that she was between twenty-four and thirty. She was young in her looks and manners, and yet there was always the impression of experience about her which would lead one to suppose, if they were not told differently, that she was a married woman."

"And for her description, I am to take practically your own self?"

"Yes. In the abstract, I think it might be said that we are much alike. About the same height and figure, and I think that our complexions and the color of our hair is about the same."

"Are you quite positive, Mrs. Carroll, that this woman was one whom you have never seen or known before?"

"I am absolutely positive of that."

"And, now, my dear madam, are you aware of the fact that you stand in terrible danger?"

She bowed her head, and her lips quivered slightly, as she replied:

"I am, Mr. Carter."

The detective continued:

"It may be of some solace to you to know that I believe your story, and so I tell you quite frankly that I do believe it; but I should be less than your friend, and your adviser, if I did not tell you, also, that it will not be generally accepted as truth. There is too much of the unreal about it, too much of the unusual. It sounds preposterous. I say all this to you in order that while you remain in this institution alone, with plenty of time to think and ponder over your affairs, and upon the predicament in which you now find yourself, that you will center your mind with all the power there is in you upon the effort to remember any and every incident in the lives of yourself, and your husband, and Merrill Gwynn, and particularly in Merrill Gwynn's career, which may tend to give us some light.

"It is plain to me now that this woman exists, and that she had, or fancied she had, some great wrong of her own to avenge, and if we accept that theory we must add to it the belief that she had convinced herself that her vengeance would not be fully satisfied unless you were yourself somehow included in it, for you must remember that no woman, no matter how wolfish in her ideas of vengeance, would plan to cast the burden of her crime upon another woman who was entirely innocent, unless that woman had, or believed she had, good reason for doing so.

"We must, therefore, conclude that the Miss Maynard who committed this deed did it out of revenge for some wrong that had been visited upon her by Merrill Gwynn; and that she had somehow been led to believe that if she could murder Gwynn before the eyes of a multitude, and could convince that multitude that you had done it, her vengeful nature would be satisfied. Now, Mrs. Carroll, she could have had this idea only for one reason, and that would be because she believed that the man she murdered was in love with you, and that possibly you returned that affection.

"You must not let this brusk statement of mine hurt you in the least. You are in a position now where you must look things in the face, and see them as they are. Your life is in danger, and in a far worse kind of danger than Merrill Gwynn's life was at the very instant that the dagger was poised above his head. I am going to leave you now, and again I want to impress upon you the necessity of centering your mind firmly upon the conditions by which you are surrounded."

He touched the bell, and the warden came.

Carlina Carroll was conducted back to her prison cell, and the warden strode to the front door of the prison with the detective.

"Well, Nick," he asked, as they were about to part, "what do you think of it?"

"It is a very remarkable case," replied the detective evasively.

"I don't suppose that you swallow that cock-and-bull story about the mysterious unknown woman, do you?"

The detective turned square around and faced the warden, and then very slowly he replied:

"Yes, I do. I believe that she tells the truth. I am convinced that she is as innocent of that crime as you are, or as I am, save in so far as she helped it along by permitting that woman to take her place on the stage."

The warden laughed aloud.

"You detectives are a queer lot," he said, as he placed his foot upon the threshold to return to his prison-house. "You are always having theories and ideas which a practical policeman, or a man who has charge of facts, like myself, would never consider, even for a moment; however, she's a pretty woman, Carter, and I hope to goodness you can save her."

When Nick left the prison he returned at once to the office of Johnny Coogan, in Court Street, where he had requested that the latter should have James Carroll on hand to meet him, and by good fortune he found Mr. Carroll there alone, Coogan having gone out temporarily.

"Carroll," said Nick, coming at once to the point he had in mind, "you and Gwynn were very good friends, were you not?"

"Always," was the instant reply.

"I have a fancy," said Nick, striding to the window and standing with his back to the other man, while he slowly lit his cigar, "that you knew Merrill Gwynn much better, and a much longer time, than anybody knows about. Is that true?"

"What has that got to do about it?" was the short, interrogatory reply.

"It may have a good deal to do about it," responded Nick, still with his back toward Carroll. "For example,

if you had known something about Gwynn in the past which he had chosen to forget, and which he preferred to have you forget, and if you had promised him that you would never mention it to him, or tell it to others. If you should choose to tell me about it now, it might make a very great difference in the fate of your wife."

There was no reply from the man who stood behind Nick Carter in that office of the theatrical agent, and the detective did not turn his head. He had only guessed that there might be such a condition existing as he had outlined in his question; and he had guessed it because of the somewhat anomalous manner of living which the three persons concerned in this tragedy had pursued. He felt now, when such dead silence followed upon his question, that it had struck home, and he was not surprised, therefore, when, after a pause, Carroll said slowly:

"I suppose I may speak in perfect confidence to you, Mr. Carter. I am a queer sort of man about some things, and one of my oddities is to keep religiously a promise that I make; and particularly when that promise assumes the character of an oath to the dead, it seems almost a sacrilege to break it. I have known Gwynn since we were boys. I knew him under another name then. It was a long time ago, and there was a period of many years when I did not see him at all, and when, as all the rest of the world did, I supposed him to be dead. I think I can assure you that nothing in his past life could possibly have any connection with this present case; but if you think differently, and if you believe that anything I might say would tend to throw light upon the darkness by which his murder is surrounded, I will break my oath to him, and tell you all I know about him."

The detective turned around now and faced Carroll.

"Carroll," he said, "you know that Gwynn was murdered, don't you?"

"Yes."

"You know that your wife is charged with having committed that murder, don't you?"

"Yes."

"You know that she did not commit it, don't you?"

There was just a slight instant of hesitation before the reply, and then Carroll said:

"I know that she did not commit a murder, for murder must be premeditated, but try as I may, I cannot and do not believe that story about the strange woman. It is all so utterly preposterous that I don't know what to believe."

Nick Carter took a quick step forward, and seized with his two hands each of the lapels of Carroll's coat, and he held him there rigidly at arm's length.

"I do not know what to say to you, James Carroll," he said severely, "save that men like you, and with no more wit than you seem to have, ought to be led around by a chain like some women lead poodle-dogs in the street. I never saw your wife in my life until an hour ago, and yet I know positively from the very light that shone in her eyes, and the very intonation of her voice, that she never committed that crime, either by design, or by accident, and that she has told nothing but the truth about the unknown woman. You are a coward to dare to think otherwise about her, and now, sir, if you do not tell me all the truth you know about Merrill Gwynn I will have you haled before the grand jury and examined there. You can take your choice."

CHAPTER VIII.

THE WICKEDEST WOMAN IN TOWN.

Somewhat to Nick Carter's surprise, James Carroll appeared to be quite unmoved by the abuse, or suggestion of abuse, which the detective heaped upon him, for it had angered Nick that this man should be willing to cast an accusation of guilt upon his own wife—he, whose place, according to the detective's ethics, would have been to defend her to the last, even though she had been guilty.

But Carroll looked up calmly into the detective's eyes, and as the latter released his hold upon him, carelessly shook himself free from the grasp, brushed the lapels of his coat where Nick's hands had ruffled them, and retreated to a chair on the opposite side of the square desk which filled the center of the room.

"I don't know but what there is some excuse for your vehemence, Mr. Carter," he said mildly. "It has never occurred to me that my wife was guilty in the sense to do harm to Merrill Gwynn. I know her better than that, and I knew him better than that; but I am free to confess to you that the story she had told about this unknown woman being substituted in her place on the stage has not been credited by me. If you say you believe it is true, I know that you make the statement because you have investigated the story, and found it to be true, and I am glad that you believe it. I am glad that it is true. But with me it seemed like a touch of hysteria on her part; as if in the beginning she had jumped at the first idea of an excuse that she could grasp, and had now gone so far that she dared not relinquish her hold upon the tale she had told."

"But all that has nothing to do with the man I have asked you tell me about," insisted Nick.

"Not at all, I am coming to that."

"Please do so at once."

"If I have hesitated to tell you what I know of the life of Merrill Gwynn, it is solely because of the reason I have already given, for I swore to him most solemnly upon the occasion of our meeting after the lapse of many years of separation that I would never, under any circumstances, no matter how serious they might become, reveal his identity."

Nick nodded, and Carroll went on:

"I shall tell it to you now, however, with the under-

standing that it is done in strict confidence, unless it shall occur in the future that it is necessary to use this knowledge I gave you in order to protect the innocent and punish the guilty; but I cannot for the life of me see how that past of Gwynn's, which I shall reveal to you, can have any relation to the present tragedy."

"I can tell best about that when I have heard it," said Nick.

"Merrill Gwynn is the youngest of four sons of the Duke of Trowbridge; the family name, you know, or could easily ascertain in 'Burke's Peerage.' Gwynn is one of seven given names with which the youngster was baptized, and which he never made use of until he chose to reappear and to follow the profession of an actor. Where he got the name Merrill, I do not know, and it does not matter.

"I have said that we were boys together, and we were, although I would not have you understand that I am a descendant from the nobility. My father was one of the duke's tenants, and his children, Gwynn, and I played together.

"He being the son of a duke, I naturally, because of birth and training, looked up to him, and reverenced him as if he were a young god; and, although after we saw no more of each other, he would not have remembered me had he met me in the street six months afterward, I retained indelibly stamped upon my memory a perfect portrait of him; and so it was that I recognized him when I did meet him again, even after many years had passed, and we had both forsaken our native land.

"But during those years—I need not count them—I had grown to be a man of the world, and from time to time information had come to me, naturally, concerning the people I had known as a lad; and among other things I was made aware of the fact that my playfellow, the duke's son, had gone wrong, had committed a crime, and had been tried and sentenced to imprisonment for it. What that crime was I need not, and will not, state. It does not matter.

"But the commission of his folly and the constant resultant consequences brought to light many incidents of his career which tended to harden, rather than soften, the hearts of those who prosecuted, and, perhaps, persecuted, him. However, there was one incident which should have pleased them, although it did not appear to do so, and that was the fact that it was developed at his trial that he had married against his father's wishes a beautiful young girl who was the daughter of one of the farmers on his father's estates.

"It appeared at his trial that this young girl, angered because the crimes of her husband had deprived her of the advantages she expected to receive because of being the daughter-in-law of a duke, testified against him, and it was largely upon the evidence that she gave at the trial that he was convicted and sentenced.

"He served his time, and was at last given his liberty, and, greatly to his surprise, when he left the prison he found his young wife awaiting him, repentant and remorseful for the part she had played in his conviction.

"He would, however, have nothing to do with her, and when she clung to him, and would have insisted upon following him away, he shook himself loose and ran; she followed him, overtook him, and seized upon him, and in the struggle that ensued she was thrown over a parapet of a bridge into the water, and he ran away without waiting to offer her any assistance, or to discover if she was drowned or not.

"Subsequently he learned that she was drowned and that her body had been found in the river a mile below that spot, and frightened, lest he should be rearrested for this new crime, or at least the appearance of crime, for he had no intention to injure her, he succeeded in making it appear that he had committed suicide himself, and shortly after that he left the country as a sailor on a merchant-vessel, and came to America.

"Now, Mr. Carter, that is practically all of his history that I know."

"How long was it after he first came to this country that you first saw him?" asked Nick.

"He had been here something less than a year at the time that I met him first."

"And so it was through your efforts, and advice, and assistance that he became an actor?"

"Yes, largely so."

"Was he always under the belief that his wife was dead?"

"No. He heard about two years ago that it was a mistake; that she was living."

"Do you know if he ever saw her?"

"I know that he did not."

"Do you know if she has made any effort to see him?"

"I do not know. But it is my opinion that she did."

"Then she must have believed that the report of his

suicide was a myth, as well as that of her own death by drowning?"

"That is quite probable."

"Did you ever know this girl whom he married?"

"I knew of her when she was a very little girl."

"Have you ever seen her since she grew to womanhood?"

"I have not."

"Have you any idea, through Gwynn, or because of information received from any other source, what became of her?"

"No."

"What makes you so positive that she has made efforts to find her husband, and see him?"

"I know it because of things that Gwynn said to me at different times, and of one positive statement he made concerning it."

"Will you tell me what he said about her at that time?"

"I cannot repeat what he said, but the substance of it was that he could never forgive her for what she had done, or for being what she was, and that as long as he lived he would never willingly see her, or speak to her again."

"Then he must have had some direct information concerning her?"

"I think he had," said Carroll slowly. "I am quite sure that he was in the habit of setting aside a sum with his bankers in London four times a year for her maintenance; but whether she ever accepted it, or received it, I do not know."

"Have you any idea, Mr. Carroll, what name she has been living under?"

"I have not."

"Tell me, then, what was her name in childhood?"

"Her name was Lucy Maynard. I think her right name was Lucile."

The detective smiled, and rose slowly from his chair, pitching away his smoked-up cigar as he did so.

"I think that will be about all, Mr. Carroll," he said, still smiling. "I don't think I need trouble you any more, and I am quite sure that you need give yourself no uneasiness for having told me the secrets of your friend's young life. And now, if you will take one word of advice from me, you will go directly from here to the jail, ask to see your wife, and tell her that you have entire confidence in the story that she has told; it will help her greatly, and it can do you no harm."

The calmness of James Carroll as he bowed his acknowledgments of the advice, and left the room, was irritating, for Nick Carter did not relish this sort of personality which could remain unmoved and apparently totally indifferent in the face of such a calamity as had come to Carroll; and yet he had not a doubt that down deep in his heart Carroll was as much perturbed as anybody.

When he was alone the detective seated himself near the window to think over what he had heard, for he no longer doubted in his own mind that Lucile Maynard was the unknown woman of this case, for what was more natural than that she should resume the name of her innocent childhood just now?

At all events, the suggestion was sufficiently reassuring to make him smile broadly, and that smile was still on his face when Johnny Coogan opened his office door and stepped inside.

"Hello, Nick," he exclaimed. "You must have had some good news judging from the expression of your phiz."

"I have," replied the detective. And then, following out an impulse that came to him suddenly, he related, in detail, to Coogan the interview that he had had with Carlina Carroll at the jail, and enough of the one that followed it with her husband to bring his story to a fitting climax in the association of the two names. The one which had been given to Carlina by the unknown woman representing herself as Miss Maynard, a millionairess, and the Lucy Maynard of Gwynn's childhood experiences.

But the instant when the detective mentioned the name of Lucy Maynard with the big intonation that he gave it, Coogan, who had seated himself carelessly upon a chair, bounded to his feet with a sudden exclamation. "By Jove! Nick," he cried, "Lucy Maynard! The most notorious, and, I think, the worst woman, in Boston. I never thought of associating the Miss Maynard that Carlina mentioned with her. I wonder if it can be the same."

"Who is she?" asked Nick. "Who is this Lucy Maynard that you know?"

"Do you mean to tell me that you don't know?" asked Coogan, grinning, "Lucy Maynard, of the Temple of Vice? Have you never heard of the Temple of Vice, the worst gambling-hell in all this part of the country?"

"Certainly," said Nick, "I have heard of it."

"Well, then, you have heard of Lucy Maynard, for the place belongs to her."

"Good," said Nick. "To-night we will visit it, and I will ask you to introduce me there."

CHAPTER IX.

THE QUEEN OF THE TEMPLE OF VICE.

The Temple of Vice at the time we write of was located on one of the side streets which leads from Washington Street, in the upper part of the city.

It had won an unenviable reputation throughout the country, and, like all such places, was much better known by people who did not live in Boston than by those residing in that city.

It was an accumulation, or rather a composite creation of several houses thrown into one, and to those who knew the secrets of it, entrance might be obtained from four different streets; also to one who was not familiar with the interior, the place was a labyrinth of hallways running in every direction, and all floors at different elevations from the ground, so that in passing from one section of the house to another it was always necessary to ascend or descend two, or three, or four, or half a dozen steps.

It has been said that every game known to the gambling fraternity was indulged in at the Temple of Vice, and that every would-be gambler, no matter what his financial condition might be, could find accommodation there of some sort, whether his limit was counted by cents or by thousands of dollars at a play.

And there were many other things said about this place which need not be mentioned here.

It is sufficient that it bore the reputation of indulging its patrons in any and every form of vice.

And over this unsavory establishment a woman presided.

The fact that she cloaked her identity under various names, and that the real proprietor of the resort could never be found and arrested, did not in the least alter the conviction that was settled in the minds of all her patrons that Lucy Maynard was, as a theatrical man would express it, the "main guy."

She had the reputation of being beautiful, and of being as smart and keen as she was comely.

It was said of her that she stopped at nothing to attain her ends, and that she had, through her establishment, amassed an enormous fortune.

She was not always visible to her patrons; in fact, it was rarely that she was to be seen at all.

Now and then, to be sure, she visited the gambling-rooms, one after another, passed through them, lingered for a moment at a table, exchanged some jesting words, perhaps, with some of her guests and patrons, and passed on.

And it was to this place that Coogan conducted Nick Carter soon after midnight on the second day after the theater tragedy.

They paused under an electric light half a block away from the Temple of Vice, and Coogan grasped Nick by the arm, while he said, in a sharp whisper:

"I have half a dozen words to say to you, Nick, before we go into that place."

"All right, old man, what are they?"

"First, I want to be satisfied in my own mind that you understand thoroughly well where you are going?"

"Sure. We are going to the Temple of Vice."

"Yes. That's it. Lucy Maynard's place. The Temple of Vice. And I want you to know, Nick, that if you make a break while you're in there that should offend Lucy Maynard you would have no more chance of getting out of it alive than a lone rat would have in a badger-pit."

The detective shrugged his shoulders and laughed.

"It won't be the first time, Coogan, that I have visited a place of that description," he said.

"Will you tell me what you propose to do after you get there?" asked Coogan.

"I would, Johnny, if I knew. But at the present moment I have no more idea about it than you have. Whatever I do there will be determined by circumstances."

"But tell me," insisted Coogan, "what is your purpose in going there at all?"

"My only definite purpose," replied the detective, "is to seek, and to obtain, a private interview with Lucy Maynard; private in so far as the habitués of the place are concerned, but one in which I shall expect you to act as witness."

"Good," said Coogan. "Come on, I'm with you."

But Nick detained him yet another moment.

"Wait, Johnny," he said, "one word of admonition to you, if you please."

"All right, Nick; what is it?"

"After we pass that door I want you to let me boss the job."

"Sure," said Coogan.

"I mean," continued Nick, "that I don't want you to take the initiative at any time, no matter what happens. Watch me, and do as nearly as you can as I do. If I move away from you, follow me; if I pass through a door, pursue me through that door; and if, before we leave the place, there should happen to be any sort of a row, which isn't likely, I don't want you to forget that you are a little chap, and try to do all the fighting. You keep in the background, and let me fight for you if it's necessary."

Coogan closed one eye, and, with a humorous curve at the corners of his mouth, twisted his brows in his own inimitable way, and answered:

"Sure, Mike; come on."

Five minutes later Coogan had whispered the password to the attendant at the door, and they stood inside of the portals of vice.

Some of our readers are, no doubt, familiar with the interiors of gambling-houses. It is to be hoped that few of them are, and that those who are not will never seek this unnecessary information.

But even to those who have visited such places in different parts of the world, the Temple of Vice would have been a revelation.

It was totally unlike anything else of its kind that has ever been known in this, or in any other, country.

When the two entered the place a negro in gorgeous livery came forward to receive them, and they were conducted, with all the dignity of a state proceeding, along a wide corridor, and finally into a spacious saloon-parlor, which was furnished with such sumptuous elegance and extravagance as to almost dazzle the eyes.

On the sides of this long room were arranged tables for various forms of gambling. Down the center of it, and along the walls, were divans, sofas, chairs, couches, and pier-seats, and the walls were hung with tapestries and paintings of untold value.

As Nick paused just inside the doorway, and surveyed the room he judged that perhaps a hundred people were assembled there, although the apartment was so vast that there would have been plenty of room for twice as many more without crowding the tables.

And luck was with Nick Carter that night, for as he and Coogan passed through the wide doorway at the south end of the room, the curtains which concealed a doorway at the opposite end, more than a hundred feet away from him, were parted, and the queen of the Temple of Vice, resplendent with flashing jewels, came like a sunburst upon them.

Coogan seized Nick by the arm convulsively: "Look! look there!" he whispered, with some excitement, "there's Lucy Maynard now, the queen of the Temple of Vice."

"Yes," said Nick calmly. "I see her."

"You're in luck, old man," continued Coogan. "You might come here every night in the year, and not see her once, and now, behold, she enters the room at the very same minute as yourself, for all the world as if it were an appointment."

"And so it is," said Nick, "an appointment made by fate. Who does she remind you of, Coogan?"

"Who, the queen?"

"Yes."

"Well, now that you mention it," said Coogan, "it may be strange, but she makes me think very much of Lucy Maynard."

"Nonsense," said Nick, smiling in response to the jest, "look again, and in your mind's eye divest her of all those jewels, and imagine that her hair is golden instead of almost red, and then tell me who she looks like."

Coogan studied her long and earnestly before he replied, and then, as Nick started to move forward again, for he saw an opportunity to meet Lucy Maynard halfway in the room, Coogan whispered:

"I give it up, old man; but if I think of it later I will tell you."

If the detective heard the remark he made no comment, for he was approaching rapidly along the center of the room, the spot where Lucy Maynard had paused, and where she was already being rapidly surrounded by her admiring patrons.

But she had seen Nick Carter from the opposite end of the room, and, always quick to notice a new face, particularly if it gave evidence of belonging to one who might be in any way advantageous to her, she had already singled Nick out for her attention, and as he approached her she glided away from the others, and, stopping directly in front of him, extended her jeweled hand.

"You are very welcome, sir," she said. "We are always glad to welcome strangers."

"Thank you, madam," replied Nick coldly.

"Do you play?" she asked.

"I have not played yet," he answered. "I entered the room at the same moment you did, but at the opposite end of it."

"Yes," she replied, with a rising inflection, and laughing lightly. "It would seem almost like an appointment, would it not? I myself have not visited this room for more than a week."

"Sure, Lucy," said Coogan, stepping forward at this moment. "That's precisely what I was saying myself. At the very moment we saw you at the other end of the room I said to Nick——" Coogan stopped as if he had been shot, and his jaw fell in consternation with what he had done. He realized too late that he had given away the cue of Nick Carter's identity, and a woman as sharp and keen as Lucy Maynard would not permit it to pass unnoticed.

But if she saw any significance in the use of the name she did not manifest it in her manner; but with an easy grace, of which she was a perfect mistress, she turned to Coogan, and, slapping him lightly on the shoulder with her fan, she called him by name, and said:

"You did not finish what you were saying, Mr. Coogan, and since I am to suppose that this gentleman is introduced here by you, will you not present him to me properly?"

But Nick, who had been deeply annoyed by Coogan's mistake, and who now saw that there was no escape from the effect of it, interrupted before the latter could reply.

"If you will permit me, madam," he said, "I very much prefer to introduce myself this time. I bow before you, Madam Maynard, in all humility—I am Nick Carter, of New York; sometimes called Nick Carter, the detective—very much at your service, madam."

CHAPTER X.

WALK INTO MY PARLOR, SAID THE SPIDER.

The only change in the expression on the face of the beautiful woman that Nick Carter could observe when he made his announcement which should have been so startling to her under the circumstances, was a gradual narrowing of the eyes while she turned them slowly from Coogan to him, and stared at him calmly for a moment without speaking. Then she smiled, and, with a touch of insolence in her manner, she inquired:

"May I ask, Mr. Carter, if you are here professionally?"

Nick Carter realized in that instant that the only possible way in which this woman could be hoodwinked, if it were possible to deceive her at all, would be by an appearance of perfect frankness; and so he answered:

"It is rarely, madam, that I go anywhere when I am not engaged upon my professional duties."

"Then I am to conclude that your answer is in the affirmative?" she asked.

He shrugged his shoulders, and laughed back at her.

"If you care to take it so, yes," he said.

"May I further inquire if I am the personal object of your visit here; I, or my establishment?"

"I can assure you, madam, that I have no interest in your establishment whatever, save a purely personal one, which is comprehended by the word curiosity; as for yourself——"

"Yes?" she said, lifting her brows.

"As for yourself," he continued, "I am quite sure that this is the first time in my life that I ever saw you, and I can positively assure you that I have never heard your name mentioned until a conversation between Mr. Coogan and myself brought it about to-day, and it was because of that conversation that we are here."

"And yet," she said, tapping her foot upon the carpet and her fan upon the palm of her hand, "you dodge the question."

"In what way?" asked Nick.

"I asked you quite directly if your professional interest here to-night was in me."

This was pinning him down to a direct answer with a vengeance, and with sudden resolution he determined to be even more frank with her than he had originally intended.

"Yes," he replied.

She laughed a little then, and turned to speak to some one who was passing; but the moment they were out of hearing she returned to the detective with the question:

"May I ask what it is about?"

"I came," said Nick gaily, thoroughly master of himself, "determined to seek, and obtain, if possible, a private interview with you, madam."

She raised her brows and repressed the suggestion of a yawn as if she were infinitely bored by the turn the conversation had taken.

"For what purpose?" she asked.

"If my purpose could be proclaimed here," said Nick, "it would not be necessary to request a private interview."

"You wish to question me?"

"I would like it, if you would permit me to ask you some questions."

"Concerning one of my patrons, or guests?"

"No. Concerning yourself."

She was plainly startled by this answer, although the effect of it could only be seen in the expression of her eyes; and they shot little pointed gleams at Nick's inscrutable face, while she asked abruptly:

"In what possible way can my private affairs concern you?"

"But," said Nick, laughing as if he were amused, "I don't think you will find I am very deeply interested in your private affairs. It is about the history of another person concerning whom, I think, you are informed that I wish to question you."

She flashed her eyes upon him again, this time somewhat ominously, and she seemed upon the point of turning away, when she controlled her anger, and exclaimed:

"Is this a joke which you are pleased to play upon me, sir? Is it some sort of a hoax with which you are edifying me, or are you in earnest?"

"I am quite in earnest," said Nick, with decision.

For a moment after that it seemed as if her eyes bored him through and through, and there was in their expression a steely, winkless glitter which told the detective better than words could have done that here was a woman who knew no law but her own, and who would stop at nothing, either to achieve her ends or to resent an injustice or a wrong that she thought had been done her.

"Very well," she said, after a moment, "if you will be so good as to amuse yourself in this room until I send for you, I will give you the interview you seek."

She stepped away from him then with a slight nod of her head, and was presently passing from table to table, pausing here and there while she tapped one upon the shoulder with her fan, exchanged a bantering word with another; and in this way she made her way to the end of the room through which she had at first appeared, and then, before any one realized it, she was gone.

"By Jove! You're in for it now, Nick," said Coogan, with an uneasy laugh, after they had watched her until she had disappeared. "I owe you a thousand apologies, old man, for making that bad break about your name, but upon my life, it slipped out before I had the least idea that I was saying it, and, once out, there was no correcting it."

"It is just as well," said Nick. "Don't trouble yourself about it, Johnny."

"But I am afraid it will get you into a devil of a pickle before we are out of this."

"Not at all. At least, I don't think so."

"You may be sure of one thing, Nick."

"What is that?"

"You have got her curiosity roused now to the boiling-point, and she'll have it out of you, everything that she wants to find out, before you leave this house to-night, or, by Heaven, you'll never leave it, or I, either."

Nick shrugged his shoulders, and turned away to one of the faro-tables, where he purchased a stack of chips, and amused himself in a whimsical way for half an hour by coppering the queen to lose, and making no other bets.

And Coogan, who stood beside him, and who, like all theatrical men, was intensely superstitious, quickly caught Nick's idea, and also purchasing a stack of chips, played the jack to win.

And the strange part of it was that, although they made very small bets, and their winnings were, therefore, light, both men won every time throughout two deals, the queen losing, and the jack winning four times in each.

Nick was smiling broadly when they drew away from the table, and Coogan was grinning, and as they seated themselves side by side in one of the S-chairs, he said to the detective:

"Nick, as sure as I'm a living man, I think now that we will win out in this adventure of ours to-night. Did you see how the cards worked both ways in our favor?"

"I saw that they worked in my favor," said Nick, humoring him. "I played the queen to lose—the queen of the Temple of Vice, you know—and she lost every time."

"Yes," said Coogan, "I know, and didn't I play the jack to win?"

"But what has the jack to do with it?" asked Nick.

"Sure, isn't the jack the knave? And isn't a knave and Old Nick one and the same? And isn't your name Nick? And if the queen loses and Nick wins in this business of ours to-night, don't we win out, and it's over and done with?"

"We do," said Nick. "That's certain. I hadn't thought of your reason for playing the jack, but I see it now."

"What I'm kicking myself for," said Coogan, "is that I didn't make hundred-dollar bets instead of those measly five-dollar ones. If I'd had the sense to do that, Nick, I'd have been eight hundred to the good now; and if I'd doubled up——"

"Oh! cut it out," said Nick. "I never knew a gambler yet who couldn't count the chips he might have won if the game was played over again."

They remained where they were for upward of an hour, and still no word came from the queen of the Temple of Vice.

Twice during that time Coogan, who was nervous and uneasy, sauntered across the room, first to one table, and then to another, to make a short play, and then to return to the detective's side.

When the second hour of waiting had almost expired, and no messenger had come from the proprietress of the establishment. Nick left his chair, and, with a glance at the great gold clock that stood in one corner of the room, said to Coogan:

"I will take one short flier at the roulette-wheel, just to try to pay for the privileges we have enjoyed here, and if in fifteen minutes Lucy Maynard has not sent for us, we will go in search of her."

"You go and search your death if you do that," was Coogan's rejoinder, but he got up and followed Nick to the wheel.

It was evident, however, that the detective was not to buy any more chips that night, or to watch the whirling ivory ball, as it sped around the wheel, for even as he dipped his hand into his pocket for money with which to purchase chips, he saw the curtains at the end of the room drawing apart once more, and one of the liveried colored servants of the Temple of Vice passed through and moved quickly in his direction.

Realizing intuitively that the man was in search of him, Nick faced about and waited his approach.

He came and bowed deferentially, while he spoke in a very low tone, so that others might not hear, he inquired:

"Am I speaking to Mr. Carter?"

"You are," said Nick.

"Madam's compliments to you, sir. She is awaiting you. Will you be good enough to follow me?"

"Certainly," said Nick; "lead on, I will follow. Come, Coogan."

The negro, who had half-turned away, stopped still in his tracks.

"I beg pardon, sir," he said, "the message was to you alone."

"But Mr. Coogan is to accompany me," said Nick.

"I beg your pardon again, sir, my orders were imperative, and I dare not disobey them. I was to take you to madam alone."

"Very well," said Nick, "so be it. Coogan, wait here until I return, or send for you."

He turned then, and followed the negro from the room.

CHAPTER XI.

NICK CARTER FALLS INTO A TRAP.

When Nick Carter passed out of the great gambling hall in the wake of the negro messenger, leaving Bill Coogan standing near the roulette-table, he knew that he was taking a desperate chance in daring to beard this queen of the Temple of Vice in her own particular den, for within the walls of her palace of infamy she was an absolute and autocratic monarch of all she surveyed, as is a captain of a ship on the high seas.

But here, where her power was unlimited when confined to the limits of her own domain, he had no doubt that she and her followers valued life—that is, the lives of others—as of very little moment if one or more should stand in the way of the accomplishment of their designs.

And he knew also that in a place of that kind there existed a thousand and one ways of covering up a crime and of misleading justice which is in pursuit of it.

Murder may be committed with impunity in such places, and many are the bodies that are found in streets of great cities supposed to be victims of highwaymen or footpads, which really have been brought from the interior of houses and deposited where they are found.

But Nick Carter never counted the cost of what he did.

It has always been his practice to go straight ahead toward the goal he had determined upon, and once when he had been smilingly accused of taking too many chances, he had replied that he never took but one chance, and that was the chance to win.

In this particular instance he believed implicitly that he could depend upon the loyalty and the alertness of Coogan.

He had known Coogan many years, and although the theatrical agent was slight of figure and youthful in his

appearance, Nick knew that he possessed, nevertheless, a fund of resource, agility, and strength which was surprising in one of his appearance.

It will be remembered that before they entered the Temple of Vice together, Nick had given Coogan solemn instructions to keep close to him, no matter what happened, and that if the detective should pass through a door and disappear, Coogan was to follow as quickly as possible, and so during their entire experience within the walls of that house to remain in as close proximity to Nick as it might be possible to do.

It was not that the detective supposed that he might be called upon to need the physical assistance of Coogan in what was to happen during or after his interview with Lucy Maynard, but he felt that the crisis of this mystifying case was near at hand, and that the evidence of Coogan, when it should come to a dénouement, would be invaluable; and, therefore, as he passed through between the curtains, he hoped that Coogan would remember the injunction he had given him, and would not be long in taking up the trail.

The way was long, and tedious, and winding. They passed through wide corridors and narrow corridors; they ascended steps and descended other steps; and it seemed to Nick as if they must have traveled at least an eighth of a mile, and have touched upon a dozen different elevations, before at last they paused in a wide, square, open hallway, which Nick judged to be located somewhere near the center of the building, and the negro pressed an electric button in the wainscoting opposite the massive mahogany door.

It swung open as if by magic, and, still in silence, the negro led the way across the threshold into a large, square, and sumptuously appointed room, which, nevertheless, had the appearance of being merely an antechamber of the queen's apartments.

And here, with a word, the negro bowed, turned upon his heel, and departed, closing the door softly behind him, and leaving the detective absolutely alone.

And then came a period of what seemed to Nick interminable waiting, and he was rapidly losing his patience; was, in fact, on the point of beginning an investigation, when, without a sound or sign of any kind of her approach, Lucy Maynard suddenly appeared before him, framed in a doorway which had suddenly been created by the swinging open of a huge painting, which extended from the floor almost to the ceiling.

"I have to apologize to the great detective of New York," she said ironically, and with a slight inclination of her head, "for keeping him waiting, but even the great must wait at times—for women. Will you step this way?"

She stood aside for him to pass, and he entered the room beyond, whereupon the door already described swung noiselessly shut again, leaving no appearance of its existence more than had been noticeable from the other side of it.

The room in which he now found himself might well be described as a sitting-room. It was an apartment that had been arranged apparently with the sole design of comfort for its occupant, and, while everything within it was rich and massive, there was nothing of the gaudy and gilded elegance of the other rooms of the house.

It was brilliantly alight with electricity, which glowed from bulbs in the walls and ceiling, so that nowhere was there a shadow cast, and the whole effect was surprisingly like daylight.

With a wave of her right hand the queen of the Temple of Vice motioned the detective to a leather-covered chair near the table, while she herself dropped into another one like it, which faced him from some distance away, but she did not seat herself until she had indicated a box of cigars on the table, and herself lit a Russian cigarette, which she smoked with evident enjoyment.

Once seated, she leaned a little forward toward him, and with a slight contraction of her straight brows, and perhaps an added glitter in her remarkable eyes, she said:

"And now, sir, that I have granted you the privilege of a private interview, what is the important topic that you have to discuss with me?"

It has been said often that Nick Carter was never at a loss what to say or do in an emergency, but at this particular moment he was certainly in doubt concerning the best course for him to pursue in this conversation with the queen of vice.

Whether to charge her boldly with the murder of Merrill Gwynn, after having substituted herself for Carlina Carroll in the play, and by the very surprise of it, and the suddenness of the accusation, wring a confession from her, or to attempt to corner her, and to force her into making damaging admissions by a system of expert questioning, he did not know.

Since he first saw her in the great gambling-hall in another part of the house, he had come to the conclusion that she was rather a remarkable woman in many ways, and that fear of consequences of her acts formed no part of her character; in a word, he did not believe that he could frighten her.

But now when she put that direct question to him he answered her with quick intuitiveness.

"I have a short story to tell you, madam, which I think you may find of interest. It will not detain you long, and I know you will be glad to hear it."

She leaned back lazily in her chair, and blew a curl of smoke toward the ceiling.

"Yes," she replied indifferently.

"It refers, madam, in an extrinsic way to the tragedy that happened at the theater the night before last. You have heard about it, I suppose?"

"Yes," she replied again, this time with a falling inflection.

"Strangely enough," said Nick slowly, and watching her narrowly while he talked, "a namesake of yours is concerned in this tragedy. I have found that it is a peculiarity of human nature that wherever there is another person of the same name as our own, and we have knowledge of it, we take more or less interest in the character and identity of that person, even though there may be no relation whatever between us. It is generally supposed, madam, that Merrill Gwynn was stabbed to death by Carlina Carroll, but the fact of the matter is that a woman of the same name as yours succeeded in substituting herself in place of Mrs. Carroll for that occasion, and the actress, although at present charged with the crime, is entirely innocent of it."

"How perfectly interesting," she exclaimed, with a slight shrug of her shoulders, and applying herself carelessly to the cigarette.

"Yes," Nick continued, purposely ignoring the contempt in her tone and manner, "and I have discovered that there is a strange history associated with that crime; a history which I had supposed you might like to hear."

"One moment, Mr. Carter," she interrupted; "I think it would be well for you to explain exactly why I would be glad to hear it."

"Because of the pronounced similarity of names between you and the woman who did the murder."

"Ah! And may I ask if you do me the honor to suspect me of the crime?"

The detective laughed softly, and flecked the ashes from his cigar.

"I knew," he said, "that a Lucy Maynard—or, to be more explicit, a Lucile Maynard—committed that crime. I have already explained to you the significance which might attach to your having a namesake. So far as you are yourself personally concerned, I have no doubt that, if you were called upon to do so, you could establish an alibi without any difficulty?"

"Quite so," she said, nodding; "go on, please."

"This Lucy Maynard, madam, was many years ago the daughter of a farmer in England, and there she unfortunately fell in love with one of the sons of the duke upon whose estates her family lived. She married him. He somehow went wrong. He committed a misdeed, was arrested for it, tried, convicted, and sent to prison largely upon the testimony of his young wife. But while he was in prison it appears that the Lucile Maynard who had become the daughter-in-law of a duke repented the testimony she had given at her young husband's trial, and sought forgiveness from him at the door of the prison when he was liberated. It seems that he spurned her, and when she became too insistent in her protestations, he threw her from him, and she fell into the water where it was supposed she was drowned. Later, the young man gave out the impression, and succeeded in convincing the world, that he had committed suicide, and the consequence was that for a long time these two young people, both living, believed each other to be dead.

"How many attempts the wife made after that, that is, if she found that her husband was living, for reconciliation with him, I do not know; but that they were many I have no doubt. It is apparent, however, that he spurned them all with the same vehemence he used at the time he left the prison.

"I know that he aroused her enmity, and, ultimately, her hatred. I know that she made threats against him, and I am sure that she determined to do him to death in such a way that he would know when death stared him in the face that it was she who killed him; that the eye of a multitude saw the deed committed, and that there would be little or no chance that she would ever be made to pay the penalty for the crime.

"That, madam, is the story I had to tell you for which I sought this interview."

"It is very interesting," she said, lazily fanning herself, "and it is idle for you to say that you do not suspect me

of being that Lucile Maynard whom you have described. If you did not, you would not be here."

The detective rose slowly from his chair, and stood before her, looking down upon her.

"Madam," he said, "I do not suspect you of the crime for the good reason that I know you are the one who committed it. Merrill Gwynn was the duke's son, and you are the Lucile Maynard who was the farmer's daughter. It becomes my painful duty to tell you in the center of your own stronghold, which you call the Temple of Vice, that you are under arrest."

She did not move so much as a flicker of an eyelash. For a full minute she stared him calmly in the eyes, while quickly and almost imperceptibly a sneering smile, derisive in its significance, appeared about the corners of her mouth; but at last she spoke.

"You amuse me," she said. "But it is quite true what you have told me, Mr. Carter. Merrill Gwynn was the son of the duke, as you have described him. I was once a little innocent country lass, whose father was a tenant on the duke's estates, and the rest of the story you have outlined quite correctly. I committed the deed exactly as you have described it, and for about the reasons that you have named, but as for being under arrest"—she laughed aloud derisively—"that is quite impossible, Mr. Carter, with the means of enforcing it that you have at hand. Instead of arresting me, I shall detain you."

With a quick leap from her chair, before the detective realized what she was doing, she violently struck a bell upon the table near at hand, and as if she had prepared this scene in every detail, four of the pictures in the room swung aside like that one already described, and in the aperture disclosed by the movement of each stood a liveried negro servant; four of them in all, and each with a rifle in his hand aimed at the detective's heart.

The Maynard woman laughed again.

"I am not your prisoner," she said calmly; "but you are mine, Nick Carter."

CHAPTER XII.

THE FIGHT IN THE TEMPLE OF VICE.

Nick Carter had anticipated something of this kind. If he had been asked before he went to that room to describe in detail what he expected would happen there, he would have guessed something very nearly to what did actually occur, for he had no doubt at any moment but that the woman had arranged some trap for him, whereby she intended to get him absolutely in her power, and then to force him to make terms with her.

The detective always trusted to his own resourcefulness, and he had not for a moment doubted that he would be able to find his way out of whatever difficulty he might encounter.

It must be remembered that as the tableau happened when the doors concealed by paintings opened and disclosed the armed negroes, both he and the Maynard woman were on their feet; were standing almost in the middle of the room, in close proximity to each other.

So certain was the Maynard woman of the security of her position that when she made the closing threat she was audacious and incautious enough to take a step forward, which brought her even nearer to the detective, and placed her so that she was almost within reach of his hand.

It was in that instant that the detective decided what to do to defend himself, and to turn the tables upon those who supposed they had him securely in their power.

It all happened so quickly that from the time when the Maynard woman delivered the threat until Nick Carter acted there was not a perceptible pause.

With one quick leap the detective placed himself opposite her, and with the same motion he seized her by the arms, whirled her so that her back was toward him, and, passing his left hand through the hollow of one of her arms, he seized the other, and so held her with one hand so that she could not escape him; and at that same instant one of the weapons which he always carried in his sleeve appeared in his right hand, and was discharged twice in quick succession.

The result was instantaneous.

Two of the negroes—those who were stationed so they were behind Nick Carter—dropped their weapons to the floor, with howls of pain and rage, and fell backward into their places of concealment, while the doors through which they had appeared swung shut and snapped securely after them. Nick knew that his bullets merely disabled each of those negroes, thus putting them out of the contest.

And knowing instinctively that there was no more danger to be feared from the rear he swung around so that it wavered from one to the other two of the remaining negroes, and thus he stood for a moment holding the queen of the Temple of Vice in front of him as a shield, and with his pistol covering the two now thor-

oughly frightened negroes who still remained in the room.

The Maynard woman struggled with all her might, but the arm of the detective that held her was like an iron band, and, strive as she might, she could not escape or materially change their relative positions.

"Drop those guns," ordered Nick sternly. And the negroes obeyed with remarkable unison—for a negro is seldom brave in the face of actual danger—the weapons rattled to the floor, while the two black men now stood unarmed and trembling before him.

It was now that Nick Carter longed for the presence of Coogan; it was now that Coogan could have been of invaluable assistance were he present; and Nick felt that not more than a few moments could elapse before there would be a rush from every quarter of the house to the assistance of the queen, who was struggling, and kicking, and screaming, and resorting to every device known to the infuriated woman to escape from him.

But he pulled her steadily backward toward the corner of the room where the solid walls told him that there could be no secret entrances or panels behind him, and there he held her, still with his own pistol extended over her right shoulder, wavering between the two negroes, who were now plainly frightened almost out of their lives.

With a sharp command he ordered them to the center of the room, and compelled them to lie down on their faces on the floor, with their arms extended at full length before them.

And now, feeling that he had, at least, a moment in which he could act freely, he released his hold upon his own pistol, thus allowing it to disappear again in his sleeve, and quickly producing a pair of handcuffs from his pocket he snapped the iron bracelets upon the wrists of the woman behind her back.

His next move, while he easily held her, was to reach above his head, and tear one of the smaller pictures from its fastenings against the wall, and then quickly pulling her back into an armchair that was near at hand, he threw the wire-cord of the picture over her head, and passed it across her throat, twisting the picture round and round behind the chair until the wire was tightened so that Lucy Maynard could not move without choking herself.

Knowing now that he could leave her alone for a moment, he sprang beside the negroes, and with more wire-cords that he tore from the walls quickly bound them hand and foot, so that they could not move.

And then, again master of the situation, he straightened up and looked around him, for now it seemed that the greatest problem of all was before him—the problem of getting his prisoner safely out of that labyrinth; for Nick Carter had no idea in what part of the house he was, save that he believed that he was somewhere near the center of it, but the way out he knew he could only find by searching through that maze of hallways and stairways which formed its interior.

He knew, moreover, that he had only slightly wounded the two negroes whom he had shot, and there was no doubt in his mind that they would return immediately with reenforcements to effect his capture.

Realizing that he must prepare to defend himself, and believing that somehow Coogan would have learned of what was happening, or would at least be making an effort to get to him because of their previous arrangement, he drew two more of the chairs into the corner of the room where the Maynard woman was already a prisoner, and placing one of them on either side of her, he fastened one of the negroes in each of them, and then he stepped behind these three chairs to use them as a barricade, for at that instant he heard the sound of rushing footsteps approaching along some near-by corridor.

He had only succeeded in taking his station behind the improvised barricade, when all four of the doors before described were burst open simultaneously, and each one was instantly filled with servants of the house, some negroes and some white men, who had been summoned to the assistance of their mistress.

But they came no farther than the doorways, for the instant that they appeared upon the threshold they discovered the barricade in the corner of the room, with the detective standing grimly behind it, a pistol in either hand, and before him, acting as an additional shield for his safety, their mistress and the two servants tied to the chairs. Not one of them dared to use a weapon that he carried, for the imminent danger of shooting down the woman they sought to save, if they did so, was instantly apparent.

And so for a full minute this tableau continued; and there it might have ended had there been no interruption, and had Nick Carter been left to work out his own salvation alone, no one can say.

But Johnny Coogan had not been idle during the time that had passed since Nick Carter parted with him in the gambling-room.

Coogan was sufficiently well informed regarding the character of that house to know that Nick Carter had gone to his death, or, at least, to place himself face to face with deadly peril, if he tried the patience of the mistress of that vicious temple too far; and so, instead of attempting to follow Nick Carter, which he knew he would be prevented from doing, he watched his opportunity, and quietly and secretly left the house by one of the many exits he knew about; for there was very little within the limits of the city of Boston that Johnny Coogan did not know.

Once outside in the street, he hastened to the nearest corner, where he knew an all-night drug-store to be located, and in a moment he had called up the nearest police-station over the telephone, and in as few words as possible explained to the sergeant at the desk the circumstances of what had happened.

The result of this was that at the very instant when the crowd rushed into the private apartment of the queen of the Temple of Vice to find Nick Carter facing them from behind the barricade which he had so strategically created, a dozen uniformed policemen were swarming through the house, piloted by Johnny Coogan, and were making their way as rapidly as possible in the direction of that same room, for Coogan knew quite well where it was located, and how it was to be found. Many was the actor-friend he had piloted to the Temple of Vice, and for that reason he had himself always been regarded as a privileged guest.

And so it was that just at the moment when the throng of servants who had rushed to the madam's rescue hesitated in the doorways, not knowing what to do, the policemen appeared suddenly behind them at one doorway, crowding those that were before them into the room, and frightening those who had appeared at the other doors out of it, so that they rushed helter-skelter in every direction, seeking only to escape the arm of the uniformed law.

* * * * * * *

The threadbare maxim which says that "Hell hath no fury like a woman's scorn" exactly explains the motive of the tragedy of the footlights.

It appeared by the confession made by Lucile Maynard after her arrest that she had never once relinquished her efforts, or overcome her desire, to restore herself to the companionship of the husband whom she had loved and lost so strangely; and the fact that he had continued to scorn and finally threaten her, having discovered who and what she was, had led her at last to make a final threat to the effect that she would take his life some time when he was in the very height of his success, and before the eyes of one of his greatest audiences if he did not relent.

The result we know. How carefully she had planned and how deftly she had arranged the details of her plot has already appeared.

No one short of a crook who feared neither man nor devil, and no one but a woman who lived only for the fulfilment of one idea, and that of vengeance, could have conceived and successfully carried out such a crime as hers.

It had been a matter of no difficulty at all for her to secure a key to the proscenium-door, connecting between the stage and the auditorium of the theater, and after she had done that it only remained for her to secure in advance for every night of the week of that performance the box which was nearest to the stage, and, therefore, to the proscenium-door.

The rest that she had to do was comparatively easy. In the rear of the box behind the curtains there was ample room for her to make such alterations in her appearance as was necessary, and she was, therefore, ready at hand at any moment to carry out the plot she had conceived.

That Nick Carter succeeded in tracing her and finding her was due first to his readiness to believe a story which seemed preposterous to others, and second to the one slip which the queen of the Temple of Vice had made in using her own name, Maynard, at the interviews with Carlina Carroll.

But it was evident that she had relied for her safety upon the very daring of her methods, and she had not for a moment believed that the Miss Maynard who represented herself as a millionairess could ever be associated, even in the most remote way, with Lucy Maynard, the queen of the Temple of Vice.

The mystery of the missing one-thousand-dollar bill is still a mystery; presumably it was found and absorbed by one of the employees at the theater.

THE END.

The next issue (545) of the NICK CARTER WEEKLY will contain "The Maynard Woman's Double; or, Patsy's Terrific Brain-storm."

The Nick Carter Weekly

ISSUED EVERY SATURDAY. HANDSOMEST COLORED COVERS

No other detective library contains stories that are half so interesting. Nick Carter has been all over the world and has had experience with all kinds of criminals.

That's why, boys, his adventures holds one's interest from cover to cover. There is no brutality in Nick's make-up—he does not need it—he uses his wits. Do not fail to get the latest number from your newsdealer.

PRICE FIVE CENTS PER COPY

For sale by all newsdealers, or sent, by the publishers to any address upon receipt of price in money or postage stamps

HERE ARE THE LATEST TITLES:

518—A Dangerous Woman; or, Nick Carter Faces a Crisis.
519—Madge Morley's Ghost; or, Nick Carter's Desperate Fight.
520—An Automobile Mystery; or, Nick Carter's Bloodhound on the Scent.
521—The Mysterious Stranger; or, Nick Carter's Complex Case.
522—The White Arm of a Woman; or, Nick Carter's Desperate Chase.
523—The Man in the Doorway; or, Nick Carter's Conquest of a Castle.
524—The Plot of the Baron; or, Nick Carter's Telling Strategy.
525—The Passenger on the Night Local; or, Nick Carter's Perfect Disguise.
526—A Double Mystery; or, Nick Carter's Strong-hand Play.
527—Clarice, the Countess; or, Nick Carter's Motor-boat Chase.
528—Clarice, the Woman Detective; or, Nick Carter's Titled Assistant.
529—The Index of Seven Stars; or, Nick Carter Finds the Hidden City.
530—An Amazonian Queen; or, Nick Carter Becomes a Gladiator.
531—A Blackmailer's Paradise; or, Nick Carter Discovers the Hidden Hand.
532—Gipsy Madge, the Blackmailer; or, Nick Carter's First-class Bluff.
533—Facing an Unseen Terror; or, Nick Carter's Day of Blunders.
534—Idayah, the Woman of Mystery; or, Nick Carter's Fourfold Problem.
535—The Making of a King; or, Nick Carter Faces His Greatest Mystery.
536—The Empire of a Goddess; or, Nick Carter's Wonderful Adventure.
537—Zanabayah, the Terrible; or, Nick Carter's Struggle With the Vitic King.
538—The Seven-headed Monster; or, Nick Carter's Midnight Caller.
539—The Woman of the Mask; or, Nick Carter's Quadruple Mystery.
540—The Masked Woman's Daring Plot; or, Nick Carter Springs a Surprise.
541—Hobo Harry, the Beggar King; or, Nick Carter Downs the Yeggman.
542—Black Madge's Hobo Gang; or, Nick Carter and the Yeggman Queen.
543—Black Madge's Vengeance; or, Nick Carter's Crafty Foe.
544—A Tragedy of the Footlights; or, Nick Carter and the Temple of Vice.
545—The Maynard Woman's Double; or, Patsy's Terrific Brain Storm.
546—Three Against Fifteen; or, Patsy's Splendid Courage.
547—A Mystery of Two Passengers; or, Nick Carter Prevents a Great Crime.

If you want any back numbers of our libraries and cannot procure them from your newsdealers, they can be obtained from this office direct. Postage stamps taken the same as money.

STREET & SMITH, Publishers, 79 Seventh Avenue, NEW YORK CITY.

How the Early Numbers of the TIP TOP WEEKLY May Be Secured

TO the boys who take interest in the adventures of Frank Merriwell and want to read everything that was written about him, we desire to say that numbers 1 to 325 of the **Tip Top Weekly** containing his early adventures are entirely out of stock and will not be reprinted. These numbers, however, were published in the Medal Library beginning with No. 150 which is entitled "Frank Merriwell's School-days." We give herewith a complete list of all the Merriwell stories that have been published in book form up to the time of writing.

We will send a complete catalogue of the Medal Library, which is just full of good things for boys, on receipt of a one-cent stamp to cover postage.

MEDAL LIBRARY AT 10c.

150—Frank Merriwell's Schooldays.
167—Frank Merriwell's Chums.
178—Frank Merriwell's Foes.
184—Frank Merriwell's Trip West.
189—Frank Merriwell Down South.
193—Frank Merriwell's Bravery.
197—Frank Merriwell's Hunting Tour.
201—Frank Merriwell in Europe.
205—Frank Merriwell at Yale.
209—Frank Merriwell's Sports Afield.
213—Frank Merriwell's Races.
217—Frank Merriwell's Bicycle Tour.
225—Frank Merriwell's Courage.
229—Frank Merriwell's Daring.
233—Frank Merriwell's Athletes.
237—Frank Merriwell's Skill.
240—Frank Merriwell's Champions.
244—Frank Merriwell's Return to Yale.
247—Frank Merriwell's Secret.
251—Frank Merriwell's Danger.
254—Frank Merriwell's Loyalty.
258—Frank Merriwell in Camp.
262—Frank Merriwell's Vacation.
267—Frank Merriwell's Cruise.
271—Frank Merriwell's Chase.
276—Frank Merriwell in Maine.
280—Frank Merriwell's Struggle.
284—Frank Merriwell's First Job.
288—Frank Merriwell's Opportunity.
292—Frank Merriwell's Hard Luck.
296—Frank Merriwell's Protégé.
300—Frank Merriwell on the Road.
304—Frank Merriwell's Own Company.
308—Frank Merriwell's Fame.
312—Frank Merriwell's College Chums.
316—Frank Merriwell's Problem.
320—Frank Merriwell's Fortune.
324—Frank Merriwell's New Comedian.

MEDAL LIBRARY AT 10c.

328—Frank Merriwell's Prosperity.
332—Frank Merriwell's Stage Hit.
336—Frank Merriwell's Great Scheme.
340—Frank Merriwell in England.
344—Frank Merriwell on the Boulevards.
348—Frank Merriwell's Duel.
352—Frank Merriwell's Double Shot.
356—Frank Merriwell's Baseball Victories.
359—Frank Merriwell's Confidence.
362—Frank Merriwell's Auto.
365—Frank Merriwell's Fun.
368—Frank Merriwell's Generosity.
371—Frank Merriwell's Tricks.
374—Frank Merriwell's Temptation.
377—Frank Merriwell on Top.

NEW MEDAL LIBRARY AT 15c.
INCREASED SIZE

380—Frank Merriwell's Luck.
383—Frank Merriwell's Mascot.
386—Frank Merriwell's Reward.
389—Frank Merriwell's Phantom.
392—Frank Merriwell's Faith.
395—Frank Merriwell's Victories.
398—Frank Merriwell's Iron Nerve.
401—Frank Merriwell in Kentucky.
404—Frank Merriwell's Power.
407—Frank Merriwell's Shrewdness.
410—Frank Merriwell's Set-back.

Published About May 27th

413—Frank Merriwell's Search.

Published About June 17th

416—Frank Merriwell's Club.

Published About July 8th

419—Frank Merriwell's Trust.

Published About July 29th

422—Frank Merriwell's False Friend.

STREET & SMITH, Publishers, - NEW YORK CITY

A GOLD MINE FOR OUR BOYS!

Second Grand Letter Competition

WE received so many hundreds of really excellent letters from readers of the **Rough Rider Weekly** in response to our first offer of gold dollars, that the Committee awarding the twenty leading prizes had considerable difficulty in carrying out their work; which, however, was finally done, the names printed, and the rewards sent forward. From time to time we shall print in our Chat Columns all these letters entering into the competition. And we also hope that every one who participated in the first contest will decide to take advantage of our second great offer. Tell us what, in your mind, a cracking good story of

RANCH AND RANGE LIFE

should be, and whether these stories by Mr. Ned Taylor fill the bill. We believe they stand in a class by themselves; and from many a Western cattle State we daily receive letters full of praise and enthusiasm for the work of

OUR COWBOY AUTHOR

which letters are written by those entirely familiar with life on the prairie ranches, and who would laugh to scorn stories by an author whom they knew never could have ridden a bucking bronco. Make up your mind to try for these golden prizes right away. Even if you fail to secure one of the twenty leading prizes, we expect to send a splendid consolation offering to every one who competes. Let us know in what way these tales of the Wild West appeal to you, and what you have done to influence your boy pards to read them regularly.

¶ The competition is open from April 1 until October 1, 1907, when the prizes will be awarded, full name and address of every winner being published in the **Rough Rider Weekly.**

HERE ARE THE PRIZES

$10 in Gold for the Best Letter.
$5 in Gold for Each of the Three Next Best Letters.
$2.50 in Gold for Each of the Six Next Best Letters.
$1 in Gold for Each of the Ten Next Best Letters.

¶ The letters should not be longer than 250 words and should be plainly addressed to "Manager of Rough Rider Letter Competition," care of Street & Smith. Now, boys, jump in and resolve to win a cash prize.

STREET & SMITH, Publishers, 79-89 Seventh Avenue, NEW YORK

DIAMOND DICK WEEKLY

ISSUED EVERY THURSDAY. **BEAUTIFUL COLORED COVERS**

Diamond Dick and his son, Bertie, are true men of the Western plains. They are noble-hearted fellows who don't impose on the weaker man and who don't let anyone else do it if they can help it.

You ought to read how they clean up a mining camp of the dishonest gamblers and other toughs who usually prey on the uneducated miners.

PRICE FIVE CENTS PER COPY

For sale by all newsdealers, or sent, by the publishers to any address upon receipt of price in money or postage stamps

HERE ARE THE LATEST TITLES:

525—Diamond Dick's Night Watch; or, The Pretty Girl of Falling Rock.
526—Diamond Dick's Three To One; or, Backed By Uncle Sam.
527—Diamond Dick's Golden Quest; or, The Secret of Snake River.
528—Diamond Dick's Long Leap; or, Single-handed Against a Giant.
529—Diamond Dick's Heiress Hunt; or, A Dash Through the Big Divide.
530—Diamond Dick at the Throttle; or, The Ghostly Headlight of Hoodoo Pass.
531—Diamond Dick's Hobo Trail; or, The Man with the Long Blue Scar.
532—Diamond Dick's Black Sign; or, A Strange Battle with a Dead Man.
533—Diamond Dick's Queer Rebuke; or, Giving a Lesson to a "Bad Man."
534—Diamond Dick's Night Ride; or, The Worth of a Thoroughbred Pard.
535—Diamond Dick on an Indian Trail; or, The Vengeance of a Navaho.
536—Diamond Dick in Arizona; or, The Foolhardy Sport of Grand Cañon.
537—Diamond Dick Over the Rio Grande; or, A Hunt for a Girl Through Mexico.
538—Diamond Dick's Shower of Gold; or, The Princess of the Montezumas.
539—Diamond Dick Below the Line; or, An American Against Big Odds.
540—Diamond Dick on Shipboard; or, Blocking a Slick Game.
541—Diamond Dick's Wide Loop; or, Roping Five at One Throw.
542—Diamond Dick's Royal Foe; or, The Strange Passage of the *Santa Cruz*.
543—Diamond Dick's College Scrap; or, A Battle For His Alma Mater.
544—Diamond Dick in the Deep Snows; or, A Close Call on the Yukon.
545—Diamond Dick's Merciless Trail; or, The Two Rascals of White Horse.
546—Diamond Dick's Steel Heart; or, The Fire Train of the Sierras.
547—Diamond Dick's Inferno; or, The Madman of the Great Black Tunnel.
548—Diamond Dick's Bad Smash; or, The New Operator at Yuba Pass.
549—Diamond Dick's Deadly Snowball; or, Tooth and Nail on Black Butte.
550—Diamond Dick, Editor; or, A Rattling Surprise for Lame Dog.
551—Diamond Dick's Stand-off; or, A Battle with Spooks on Hallowe'en.
552—Diamond Dick's Hoodlum Trail; or, Hot Politics at Lame Dog.
553—Diamond Dick's Queer Hold-up; or, The Blonde Innocent from Deadwood.
554—Diamond Dick on Guard; or, The Treasure Train of Vallejo.
555—Diamond Dick's Easy Win; or, A Deal with Three Bad Men.
556—Diamond Dick's Indian Ally; or, The Serpent Trail of the Apache.
557—Diamond Dick's Giant Swing; or, The Demon Horse of Black River.
558—Diamond Dick's Dynamite Victory; or, The Anarchist Plot at Pocomo.

If you want any back numbers of our libraries and cannot procure them from your newsdealers, they can be obtained from this office direct. Postage stamps taken the same as money.

STREET & SMITH, Publishers, 79 Seventh Avenue, NEW YORK CITY.

THE FAVORITE LIST
OF FIVE-CENT LIBRARIES

Nick Carter Weekly

We know, boys, that there is no need of introducing to you Nicholas Carter, the greatest detective that ever lived. Every number containing the adventures of Nick Carter has a peculiar, but delightful power of fascination.

ROUGH RIDER WEEKLY

Ted Strong was appointed deputy marshal by accident, but he resolves to use his authority and rid his ranch of some very tough bullies. He does it in such a slick way that everyone calls him "King of the Wild West" and he certainly deserves his title. $100 in cash are given to the readers of this publication,
Buy a copy and learn how to come in for a share of it.

BRAVE AND BOLD

Every boy who prefers variety in his reading matter, ought to be a reader of Brave and Bold. All these were written by authors who are past masters in the art of telling boys' stories. Every tale is complete in itself.

MIGHT AND MAIN

These are stories of the adventures of boys who succeeded in climbing the ladder of fame by honest effort. No more interesting tales can be imagined. Each number is at least one-third longer than the ordinary five-cent library.

DIAMOND DICK WEEKLY

The demand for stirring stories of Western adventure is admirably filled by this library. Every up-to-date boy ought to read just how law and order are established and maintained on our Western plains by Diamond Dick, Bertie, and Handsome Harry.

BUFFALO BILL STORIES

Buffalo Bill is the hero of a thousand exciting adventures among the Redskins. These are given to our boys only in the Buffalo Bill Stories. They are bound to interest and please you.

BOWERY BOY LIBRARY

The adventures of a poor waif whose only name is "Bowery Billy." Billy is the true product of the streets of New York. No boy can read the tales of his trials without imbibing some of that resource and courage that makes the character of this homeless boy stand out so prominently.

The Tip Top Weekly

Frank Merriwell and his brother Dick are known and loved by over one hundred and fifty thousand of the best boys in the United States. They are both clean-cut, vigorous fellows who dare to do right no matter what the consequences. Get the current number. We are sure you will like it.